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**SOUTH OF
THE RIO GRANDE**



SOUTH OF THE RIO GRANDE

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Frontispiece by
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NEW YORK
THE MACAULAY COMPANY

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PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

TO
MY MOTHER

SOUTH OF THE RIO GRANDE

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CHAPTER I

FOR two hundred miles or more the figure of a young woman enveloped in a long chinchilla coat had maintained a position of complete immobility. There were few passengers in the coach, and as the heavy train sped through the night, she kept her face always towards the window, to the darkness outside.

Rain seared the dark pane; she could hear the shriek of the wind, and against the window the swish of lashing raindrops.

Beside a pile of literature on the seat before her reposed an entirely new suit-case with the initials "E. M." stamped neatly and freshly upon its bright yellow surface. The girl wore a close-fitting little hat of dark blue silk. A long veil, also darkly blue, depended from the hat, but failed to obscure the prepossessing features and fine eyes of the wearer. One of her grey-gloved hands, which were well-shaped, but not small, rested on the moist sill of the window; the other was hidden deep in the silk and fur of an expensive muff. Her posture, face to the window was unnatural. But having taken that position many hours before, it seemed as though she had determined not to relinquish it until the journey's end.

Time and again during the night the conductor passed through the long car, and at each visit the lady in the blue veil maintained her attitude of strained attention upon the darkness outside. Only when dawn came did she turn her head. Then, lifting the blue veil an inch or two, she touched her lips delicately with a fine cambric handkerchief.

At this juncture the conductor, a big powerful man, bustled through the car. And this time, as he passed, the lady passenger, dropping her veil, put up a hand and beckoned him.

"When do we arrive in Montreal, please?"

The conductor gave the information briskly and automatically, and passed on, banging the door at the farther end of the corridor. After that he saw no more of the girl in the chinchilla coat and blue veil. He did not see her leave the car when the train reached Montreal. He was therefore unable to supply satisfactory information as to her movements when three detectives hurriedly boarded the train and put him through a "third degree" of questions.

The conductor was an observant man, however, and so far as a description of her appearance went his answers were entirely satisfactory.

"Yes, new yellow suit-case. Couldn't remember initials on it. Sure, she wore a long grey fur coat, blue hat, blue veil, slender figure, carried herself well. A good looker, too, for all she wore that thick veil. What did you want her for?"

The chief of the three detectives met the conductor's question with a condemnatory and repressive eye. He wanted, he said, information, not garrulity. He was vis-

ibly annoyed that the girl had got away, and he seemed inclined to visit his annoyance on his two subordinates and the car conductor. When he went away the car conductor decided that he did not like the chief detective. And he did wonder what they wanted her for. That girl was a good looker sure. Well, he hoped they wouldn't get her, whatever it was.

The car conductor's hope seemed by way of being fulfilled, for at dusk that evening the girl in the chinchilla coat, still wearing the close-fitting hat and the provocative blue veil, hurried aboard a vessel lying in dock at Quebec.

She had shrewdly booked a passage through a subagent's office in a small town near Montreal. The vessel was the *Lake Lachine*, one of the smaller boats of the Grey Pearl Line. As the girl reached the head of the gangway, the chief steward, who had been impatiently awaiting her arrival—the vessel being on the point of leaving—stepped forward and politely enquired her name.

"Morris—Miss Edna Morris, of New York. That's all my luggage," she explained; "I was too rushed to bring anything else." She stood aside to permit the passage of a shorehand who had ascended the gangway carrying her bright yellow suit-case.

"You are expecting me?"

"Yes, we got a 'phone message reserving a stateroom from our suboffice at Four Rivers."

"I was afraid you might be very crowded?"

Marwood, the steward, shook his head.

"We don't carry many any time, and it's our last trip of the season by this route. You are the only lady passenger."

Miss Morris laughed gaily and musically, as though something that had been repressed in her had suddenly been released.

"Oh, I shall not mind that," she said; "I am used to being alone."

She lifted her veil as she spoke, and the steward became instantly reverentially aware that Miss Morris of New York was without doubt the best-looking woman who had ever stepped aboard the *Lake Lachine*. She was young, not more than twenty-four or twenty-five, with a rich, creamy white skin, and arresting dark eyes. But the remarkable feature of her beauty was the vivid scarlet of her full lips. Miss Morris's richly curved red lips were as arresting to the gaze as the dark eyes themselves.

"She's a peach," thought the steward, and invited her to accompany him to the deck stateroom that had been reserved for her accommodation. Miss Morris, followed by the shorehand with the suit-case, fell into step at his side. At No. 3 cabin on the upper deck the steward drew open the door and preceded her into a large, white-painted, airy-looking stateroom. There were two berths, and beneath brass-bound portholes a gay scarlet plush locker ran the length of the apartment.

Miss Morris, her veil thrown back over her small neat hat, uttered an exclamation of pleasure.

"Oh, thank you, steward. What a fine stateroom!" Her eyes swept its bright amenities. "And I have it all to myself?"

The steward assured her that this was so, and, instructing the shorehand where to deposit Miss Morris's suit-case, moved towards the door.

"We carry a stewardess," he said as he went out; "two rings for her, miss, one for me."

"Thank you, steward."

A moment later Miss Morris was alone in the cabin.

For the fraction of a second the girl remained motionless, her fine heavy-lashed eyes fixed on the closed door. Then the hoarse, rending note of the ship's siren tore her ears. Her head lifted in swift consciousness of something. She became aware that the cabin had grown tremulous with a low, murmurous vibration. And on this vibration her whole mind concentrated itself. She listened, superbly poised, pale, with shining eyes.

A curious low laugh escaped her. . . . They were moving . . . ! She sped to the open porthole and looked out over the St. Lawrence. The vessel was gently gliding oceanwards.

Softly she laughed again. Then seating herself on the locker, covered her face with her hands and began to tremble violently.

Two hours later, at dinner that evening, Miss Morris made the acquaintance of the Captain of the *Lachine*, a tall young man with a smooth-shaven face, dark hair, and a skin weather-tanned to a deep indelible brown.

Martin Biddeford had been at sea since his sixteenth year, and was younger than his own first and second officers.

When the sole lady passenger of that voyage entered the saloon, the Captain was already in his place at the head of the table. A seat had been left vacant at his right hand, and, responding to his gesture, Miss Morris steered her way towards it. She took her place with certain graceful feminine flutterings, unfolded a table-

napkin, and surveyed the company. There was now no trace whatever of agitation on her face.

The *Lachine's* passengers totalled a round dozen of well-nourished, easy-tempered business men who talked money in thousands. But the Captain alone held her attention. Here was a strong, confident, and masterful sailor, with the fine, keen blue eyes not uncommon in men who follow the sea.

Across the narrow width of the table opposite Miss Morris sat Abel Johnson, a New York financier with extensive interests in oil and copper. Johnson was a softly fat man of fifty, with a big shaven area of pallid countenance. His eyes were sleepy, but as his gaze rested on Miss Morris he appeared suddenly to wake up. Recollection stirred in him. Somehow he seemed to remember that he had seen that beautiful face before.

"They tell me, Miss Morris," said Abel Johnson, "that you are from New York."

Miss Morris, who had slipped dexterously into conversation with the Captain, was explaining fluently that she was hurrying to England to the bedside of her mother, who had been taken seriously ill. Intent on the Captain, she missed Johnson's remark. He repeated it: "You are from New York?"

"Yes," the girl answered.

"I am a New Yorker myself," pursued Johnson. "I think you and I will have mutual acquaintances. I guess we may even have met?"

But Miss Morris responded quickly and decisively:

"I think not. I am from the South, and am almost a stranger in New York."

"That's a pity, Miss Morris."

This remark elicited from her no answer at all, and in some subtle way Johnson felt that he had been rebuffed. The girl's manner said as plainly as words that she had no wish to improve her acquaintance with Mr. Johnson.

On the other hand, her manner to the Captain narrowly missed effusion. A close observer of women might have said that her smiles came with a little too much freedom. But Captain Biddeford, where women were concerned, was not a close observer, and Miss Morris's attentions were worth having. He had never been so swiftly and keenly interested by a woman in his life before. Miss Morris possessed the curiosity of a child. Her questions about his wireless were laughable. But she wanted to know. She really did want to know how it all was done. Therefore, Biddeford, to elucidate technicalities, introduced McGuire, the Marconi operator, who occupied a seat at the bottom of the table.

McGuire, by nature a talker, was delighted to get into conversation with the lovely lady passenger. He readily offered to explain his apparatus any time she liked to come along to his wireless room. Miss Morris thanked him, and returned her attention to the Captain, to Abel Johnson, and the entire company. In fact, by the time the meal was at an end the lady passenger of the *Lachine* had put the whole table in a good humour.

Finally, Miss Morris rose and ascended the companion to the deck. The moment her neat silk-clad angles disappeared above, fat Abel Johnson of New York stirred in his chair. He held a long cigar between his first and second fingers, and his eyes wheeled and fixed themselves upon the Captain.

"Captain Biddeford," he announced, a slightly querulous

note in his voice, "I guess I've seen that girl some place before."

* * * *

Two hours later Captain Biddeford, wearing a heavy pea-jacket, ascended to the bridge. The night was dark and starless; a wet wind blew from the west. As he paced back and forth, his thoughts automatically reverted to Miss Morris. The girl had told him she was hurrying to England to the bedside of her mother. Beyond that and the fact that she was from the South she had vouchsafed nothing about herself. She spoke with a slight but indubitable American accent. Nevertheless, there was something English in her manner. Biddeford was pondering this subject when he noticed below him two figures side by side on the saloon deck. McGuire was one of those figures and Miss Morris the other.

Biddeford drew his heavy eyebrows together. The sight in no way pleased him—the new passenger was flirting with McGuire of all men! Why McGuire? For if there was an unprepossessing individual aboard the *Lachine*, that individual was the wireless operator. He recalled, with a sense of irritation, McGuire's alacrity in inviting her into his wireless room during dinner. The Captain watched the two conversing until they turned a corner and disappeared behind the charthouse. After that he attended strictly to business.

In the meantime McGuire, with the girl at his side, passed along the deck and paused at the Marconi room. Here he unlocked the door, switched on the shaded electric light, and stepped over the threshold.

Then he turned and looked at her.

"Come right in and sit down," he invited, with a gesture towards a chair at the corner of his table.

As Miss Morris subsided into the chair, McGuire slipped into his own seat at the table. He took up the telephone headpiece, clamped it over his ears, and put out his narrow, sallow hand to a pointer on the left side of the table.

Miss Morris, muffled in her fur coat, her lustrous eyes fixed upon him, waited, watching him with quiet intentness. His left hand, holding the pointer, moved rhythmically—right, left, right.

"What are you doing, Mr. McGuire?" asked the girl.

"I'm waiting for the Poldhu call," he explained; "it's due about now. We get our English news from them."

Suddenly bright blue, crackling, and viciously active sparks leapt into being in the spark-gap. The groping swing of the pointer in his left hand stopped. His fist shot out and grabbed a slip of paper headed "News Message."

"This is Poldhu speaking now," he explained.

The sparks continued to crackle, and his right hand slipped over the foolscap, jotting down the news sent out broadcast from the Cornish station two thousand miles away.

Miss Morris leaned forward and read the news as it formed under his hand.

When the ordinary news message of the day had been taken down, the girl glanced up and smiled. There was an expression of intense relief in her eyes.

"You look so odd with that thing on your head; must you always wear it?" Another of her naïve questions.

"It's easier," he answered, "though I expect I could take a message without it—listening to the sparking, for instance."

In her absorption, Miss Morris had laid her white hand on the table. McGuire noticed the flash of jewels on her fingers. As she leaned eagerly forward, her face approached his, and some faint perfume she used caressed his nostrils. The situation at that moment appealed to him intensely; there was something delightful in her intimate contiguity.

"It's the Morse code, of course?" she asked.

"Yes."

She hesitated a moment, then enquired in a tone of casual politeness:

"I suppose you get all sorts of messages?"

"All sorts," answered McGuire. He gave the pointer a swing to the right, and suddenly a high-pitched note began to sound in the little cabin and the spark-gap grew again into life.

"This is the *Leviathan* speaking, Miss Morris," he explained. "She's speaking a thousand miles out from Liverpool—not to us, of course."

He listened for some moments to the giant liner's call, then turned to his companion, at the same time taking off his headpiece.

"Would you like to 'listen in' on this?" he asked.

A moment later he slid the double receiver over Miss Morris's thick, dark hair.

The girl listened to the snap, snap of the message; then removed the headpiece and handed it back to him.

"How marvelous it all is, Mr. McGuire!"

"That message will travel for three thousand miles

before it becomes indecipherable," McGuire informed her. On his table lay an open box of cigarettes. With a pretty gesture, the girl took it up and offered it to him.

"Smoke," she commanded archly, "and tell me all about it. I'm so stupid about these things."

He took a cigarette and extended the box to her. She shook her head, and, as he lit up, her eyes moved over the many switches and wires veining the wall.

"How cosy it is in here, Mr. McGuire!"

"It's all right," responded the operator, luxuriously exhaling smoke.

"Doesn't your machine ever get out of order?"

Her tone struck McGuire indifferent and casual, and the fact flattered him. Was she interested in wireless, or was she not? He rather fancied not, but he talked fluently thereafter for half an hour, telling her all there was to tell. He had seldom seen a woman to whom it was so easy to talk; and when Miss Morris rose to go, she held out her hand. For a moment he pressed her fingers in his.

"Good-night, Mr. McGuire," she said, hovering a moment in the doorway to wave farewell; "was I dreadfully stupid?"

"No," he replied gallantly, "you were clever as they make them."

A compliment which seemed to amuse Miss Morris, for she laughed softly to herself as she slipped away aft towards her cabin.

CHAPTER II

FOR four days after that McGuire believed himself to be making headway with the *Lachine's* lady passenger; but on the fifth day out he found himself in a state of mystification, for Miss Morris's attitude had suddenly changed. She had grown frigid and aloof; but whenever the Captain, during his limited hours of leisure, was free of his deck, Miss Morris seemed to find her way into his company.

From being puzzled at her mysterious change towards himself, McGuire became jealous and annoyed. Why had she been so coming on in his wireless room? She had put her face close to his. Her beringed fingers on the operator's table had touched his, and she had not removed them. Had she been playing with him, and was she now playing with the Captain? Biddeford was the kind of man who would never guess that she was merely amusing herself with him. But, of course, she was pulling the Captain's leg as she had pulled his—sitting so close to him in the wireless room that he could feel the warmth of her body and the fragrance of delicate perfume—violets, he thought. . . . Well, he hoped Biddeford would burn his fingers.

* * * * *

In the meantime Biddeford was finding the voyage the pleasantest he had made for some time. He was a busy

man, a hard worker, and a good seaman, who, after a day's work, liked a cigar, a game of cards, and something in a glass. He had not much occupied himself with women in the past. But Miss Morris was different; she knew how to talk sense, and Biddeford liked that. Or, rather, he liked to talk sense and to feel the flattery of Miss Morris's rapt attention. Moreover, once when he dropped into a deck chair at her side, she had laid her hand on his for the merest fraction of a second, and then had discovered the fact and snatched it away again. It was this contact of Miss Morris's warm, vital hand that seemed to advance their acquaintance by leaps and bounds. By the time the *Lachine* had been a week out of the St. Lawrence, the girl and the Captain were the best of old friends.

And McGuire, who was nowhere, spent all his leisure time at cards in the smoke-room. On the seventh night out the wireless man left the smoking-room at eleven o'clock as usual, and went along to the operating-room to pick up the night's news messages. It was a bright and keen starlit night with a temperature well below freezing, and as the young man stepped into his cabin and switched on the light, he blew on his fingers. There was no sea, and the ship rode as steady as a rock. McGuire took up his headpiece, clamped it about his head, and dropped into the revolving chair at the table. His left hand sought the pointer and began to swing it—right, left, right. Automatically he drew a piece of foolscap towards him, and under the printed heading "News Message" poised his pencil. He was waiting for the nightly message from the American sending station at Arlington. Once, as he swung the pointer, he caught the peculiar high singing note

from the Eiffel Tower, and switched off again. Then the German Nauen note reached him. That, also, he did not want to hear.

His hand began to swing again; in the ensuing silence the ticking of his clock became audible. Arlington was a long time coming to-night. He sat back in his chair waiting. Minutes slipped audibly away. Then the contact points leapt viciously and suddenly into life. Blue light flashed and crackled in the quiet room. McGuire's fingers, holding the pencil, moved upon the foolscap sheet. It was Arlington this time—America's day's news, followed by the market prices.

He began to write:

"Big fire in Brooklyn, million dollars damage. Harding's big speech on League of Nations. . . ."

Another message came through. McGuire began to write, and suddenly sat erect, tense with interest, catching the name of his own ship:

"Special message to Captain s.s. *Lachine*."

McGuire's pencil flew over the sheet, and as the words formed themselves in the dot and dash code, his mouth, slowly, but more and more noticeably, sagged open with amazement.

"My God!" he breathed, his sharp black eyes staring aghast at the letters before him.

The message which had reached him from Arlington ran as follows:

"Captain s.s. *Lachine*. Have you woman passenger aboard, age twenty-four, height five foot seven inches,

hair dark, prepossessing appearance, probably travelling under name Edna Morris? Is wanted for murder Norman Grant, Grant Corporation, New York. Detain Liverpool. Relay on answer.—Signed WOOLASTON, Chief Police, New York."

The sparks continued to snap and crackle. A second police message came through. This time it ran:

"Family Norman Grant offering ten thousand dollars reward to person giving information leading to apprehension Edna Morris."

The blue sparks lapsed for a time. Then the Wall Street closing prices began to come through. But McGuire paid no heed. He was leaning back in his chair staring again at the amazing, the cataclysmic news he had just written down. For fully five minutes he remained motionless, grappling with the immensity of the thing that had occurred. He stirred at last, however, and a curious light dawned and began to glow in his eyes. With a quick movement he jerked off his headpiece, rose, and passed long fingers through his hair. His sallow face was still bent upon the message. With a nervous hand he began to pluck at his lower lip.

"My God!" he breathed again. "So that's it! Murder! . . . No wonder she wanted to see my wireless!"

From the moment of coming aboard the woman must have known that this message was hanging over her, and at any moment the blow might fall. And what a blow—God! what a blow!

He glanced at the instrument. On that very table her white jewelled hand had touched his. What a woman!

Deep, deep. . . . Murder . . . murder of Norman Grant——

He thought of Biddeford. For days Miss Morris had been fooling Biddeford as she had fooled him. He had been jealous of Biddeford, but now——

Something like the sound of a checked laugh rose in his throat. And suddenly he leaned forward, snatched up the fatal message, crushed on his cap, and hurried out on the deck, leaving the door wide open behind him.

“Mr. Captain Biddeford,” he thought triumphantly, “you are smart, but when you read this——!”

The deck was deserted and the sea like a mill-pond as he stepped out beneath the stars.

CHAPTER III

CAPTAIN BIDDEFORD, who had been putting in an hour during the second officer's watch, descended from the bridge at eleven-thirty that night intending to get a game of poker with Abel Johnson and other practitioners of the art of bluff in the smoking-room. As he moved along the deck he passed the two portholes of Miss Morris's cabin. There was a light within, and he slackened his pace for a moment or two. Somehow, in some inexplicable way, that light in the lady passenger's cabin touched a sentimental chord in him. It suggested womanhood and home-keeping. Miss Morris was in there, probably reading a book, probably sewing. The picture that presented itself was alluring and full of delicate charm. Mentally he saw the girl sitting there with bent head, sewing. He could see the creamy white skin of her neck, and the hair, which was intensely dark, and yet could not be described as black.

A low, light laugh reached him.

"Oh, Captain, what a hurry you are in!"

"Eh?"

He stopped and looked through the open doorway at the head of the saloon companion. His sentimental assumption was entirely wrong, for Miss Morris was waiting there in her chinchilla coat, without a hat and with collar upturned.

"What a lovely night it is, Captain!" She stepped over the high door-sill and stood before him.

"Yes, it's a fine night," admitted Biddeford.

"And yet you're going into that stuffy smoke-room to gamble?"

"We don't gamble."

"To play cards, then. But it seems a crime to stay indoors on a night like this."

The Captain stopped, took out a cigar, and lit it. Then he and Miss Morris walked together to the rail, and Miss Morris looked out over the black mystery of the waters. There was a dark witchery in the scene—beauty and mystery. It was as though powdered stars lay gleaming on the tremulous, limitless floor of the sea.

"I suppose we shall be in Liverpool the day after tomorrow?" she asked.

Biddeford shook his head.

"We've got a good three days' run to make yet. Are you in a hurry to get ashore?" he asked.

"No; I am enjoying the voyage immensely. Sometimes I wish I could go on and on in the *Lachine* for ever without going ashore at all."

"Thanks for the bouquet," laughed Biddeford; and as the words left his lips a door shot open at the farther end of the deck and McGuire emerged precipitously. The door of the wireless room behind him remained open, and the light from within cast a wedge of brightness over the deck.

McGuire was coming aft towards them with long strides. He could see Biddeford vaguely, but when he made out that Miss Morris was with him he checked his speed for a moment, then again advanced.

"Hallo, Mac! What's the trouble?" the Captain called.

"A message," said McGuire, halting within a yard of him. "It's important; I'd be glad if you'd come along and——"

"All right," said Biddeford, "I'll come." He turned to Miss Morris. "Excuse me," he remarked.

A moment later he and McGuire, side by side, were proceeding together towards the chart-house.

Miss Morris, left alone on the deck, followed the two with her eyes until both had vanished behind the chart-house door. Despite the darkness, she had detected the agitation on McGuire's face and in his manner. For minutes she stood still, deep in thought; then, with a glance over her shoulder, she began to move lightly and stealthily forward towards the splash of light which emerged from the wireless cabin. An urgent purpose animated her. McGuire's carelessness in leaving open the door had placed an opportunity in her hand which she seized with avidity. She reached the wide-open door, glanced once more over her shoulder, and vanished within. For five minutes Miss Morris occupied herself in the wireless room, then once more cautiously stepped out and, proceeding leisurely along the deck, vanished into her own state-room.

"Well, what is it?" demanded the Captain, when the two had reached the chart-house and Biddeford had switched on the light.

"It's that message—at the bottom there," said McGuire.

Captain Biddeford took the foolscap, and holding it under the electric light read it from end to end.

McGuire, with his thin lips drawn into a tight line, watched him narrowly; but when Biddeford suddenly

looked up and stared at him, thunderstruck by the news, he put in quietly:

"Well, Captain, what do you think of that?"

Biddeford was silent.

"That describes our passenger to a 'T,'" went on McGuire. He laid his finger on the message still in Biddeford's hands. "'Traveling under name Edna Morris,'" he read. "I tell you I was knocked endways when I read that."

Biddeford drew himself up, and slowly began to fold the message. Then, unbuttoning his coat, he placed it in his inner pocket.

"No one sees this except you and me, Mac—you understand?"

"What about answering it?" put in McGuire quickly.

"Eh?"

"They'll want an answer to-night."

Biddeford's mouth suddenly hardened.

"You'll send an answer when I tell you to," he said.

"I intend to sleep on this."

He glanced towards the door. "How do you know this describes our passenger?"

McGuire laughed sourly.

"You know it as well as I do, Captain."

"Well, if it does," retorted Biddeford, "we needn't worry her about it yet. We can keep an eye on her. And in the morning we can put out a message. I'll write it, you understand?"

"It ought to be answered to-night," protested McGuire, "it seems to me——"

"It seems to me," returned Biddeford, suddenly blazing, "you'll close your face or I'll close it for you. I'm

Captain here, and you'll send out no message without my permission."

McGuire turned and moved towards the door. Biddeford threw out a hand and twisted him round by the shoulder.

"And listen to this," he went on, "I'll have no word of this to anyone aboard."

"I don't know why you take it all like this," said McGuire sullenly. "I'm not kicking."

"Don't," warned Biddeford, holding him with a menacing eye.

A moment or two later McGuire went out of the chart-house and into the smoking-room for a drink. He felt he needed a drink after that interview with the Captain. What was the matter with Biddeford? He had looked at him queerly, boring into him with his eyes. In the past there had been no love lost between the young Captain and the wireless operator, but why had Biddeford treated him like that in the chart-house? Was he so much stuck on this girl that he could not see the right of things? The only woman passenger aboard the *Lachine* was wanted for murder. Biddeford knew it as well as himself. And there was offered that reward of—ten thousand dollars—ten thousand dollars. . . .

* * * *

During the whole of that night Biddeford occupied himself with the problem of Miss Morris. He slept not at all, and twice in the night he got up and switched on the electric light and re-read the message received by McGuire.

When morning came he rose before daylight, and dressed himself slowly, in a deeply ruminative mood.

That girl guilty of murder! No, he could not conceive it possible. In the light of day it seemed the wildest of improbabilities.

By nine o'clock he had left his cabin and was in the chart-room writing a message in duplicate. In his life at sea he had performed many unpleasant duties, but none which upset him as did the writing of that message of death. But, after all, duty was duty.

When he had completed the task, he locked one copy of the message in the drawer and, taking the other, went out on deck and strode towards the wireless room. As he passed Miss Morris's stateroom, he felt acutely conscious of the drama of the moment; an intense pity for the girl swept over him. He preferred not to think of possibilities, and hurrying along towards McGuire's quarters, he halted, drew open the door, and stepped inside. His mouth was grimly set.

McGuire's attitude in the matter the night before had jarred him badly. There was something sinister and bad in McGuire's character that made his hackles rise.

And now he felt a swift contempt as he saw the man in his shirt-sleeves seated at his table, his long, sallow face intent on various items and sections of the instrument which lay before him.

McGuire jerked his head round sharply as Biddeford entered. The Captain gave him a curt morning greeting.

"This is the message you'll send out about Miss Morris," he commanded, his back to the door. "You can send it right away."

McGuire remained looking at him. There was a long

pause. A curious expression twisted the operator's lips.

"Can I?" he returned slowly. A savage note underlay the smoothness of his tones. "Well, I guess I can't send it." He was silent a moment, then added: "If you want to know anything, somebody's been tampering with the machine." He suddenly fixed his black, sharp eyes on Biddeford.

The Captain moved forward. His eyes met those of the wireless operator.

"Tampering with it?" he repeated.

"I always lock my door when I go out," went on McGuire—there was still that savage note in his tone—"but last night when I came along to you with this message I forgot it."

He stopped and, turning his head, looked significantly at the Captain. His look said as plainly as words: "Miss Morris tampered with my machine."

* * * * *

Whether McGuire's surmise was correct or not, the fact remained that for two days no message could be sent or received aboard the *Lachine*. Abel Johnson and the other business men in the saloon clamored for news and market prices without avail.

And all the time, hour after hour, day and night, McGuire sweated at the task of putting the instrument in order. Neither he nor Biddeford spoke to Miss Morris upon the matter. The Captain warned him that the girl was to be kept entirely in the dark as to how matters stood until the police came aboard at Liverpool.

McGuire was utterly baffled by the machine's mysterious

failure, for try as he would it was impossible for him to send a message. What in God's name had she done? He had examined everything—the leading-in wire, the magneto, the detonator. With infinite care, for the hundredth time he went over every section of his instrument. Nothing was out of order. And yet it was impossible for him to send or receive a message. The thing left him gaping—there was a sort of witchery about it. He rose, lit a cigarette, and with hands thrust deep in his pockets paced back and forth, glowering at his table. Finally he went to a drawer at the right hand of his desk, drew it open, and, taking out a sheet of paper, read the carbon copy of his last message received. Greed gleamed in his eyes:

“Family Norman Grant offering ten thousand dollars reward to person giving information leading to apprehension Edna Morris.”

McGuire jerked up his head and glanced quickly over his shoulder. His cabin door was locked, but something—his own thoughts—had startled him.

“Ten thousand dollars!”

“My God!” he breathed aloud, and reverently, almost as though it were a sacred thing, he laid back the portentous lines in his drawer, turned the key, and locked it.

If he could send a message before they got to Liverpool, before the Captain could give information, that money would be his. His eyes went again to his instrument. He dropped into a chair and, resting his elbows on the table, clutched his hair with long, sallow fingers. His eyes passed meticulously again over every item of his instrument. If he could send that message—if! What, in God's name, *had* she done? His eyes were resting full

on his magneto, and as he looked a sudden thrill went through him. He recalled something he had said to Miss Morris seven days before, something about the poles of the magneto.

In a flash his fingers were busy with the screws. In fifty seconds the magneto was in his hands. He held it, scrutinized it, turned it, and screwed it into place again. Then his fingers flew to the sending key. But almost before he touched it he knew that the instrument was in order. Miss Morris, acting on his own gossiping information, had merely reversed the poles of the magneto. A brilliant trick, most difficult to discover! And he, like a fool, had been two days finding out! But he had her now. It was all right now. That ten thousand dollars was his.

There was a gleam in his eye, his lips were pursed in a thin, tight line, as he tapped out a death-giving message into the wide spaces of the night.

* * * *

Five minutes later McGuire reached the door of the chart-house, seeking the Captain. There was a gleam still in his eye. The night was dark, and as he put his hand to the door he heard voices on the other side. Someone was in the chart-house talking to the Captain. In a flash McGuire was at the porthole looking in. Through the thick glass he could see Biddeford standing near the chart-table, and round Biddeford's neck were a pair of smooth white arms. Miss Morris's face was upturned to the Captain. She was uttering words which McGuire could not hear. For a moment he hesitated, then briskly

smote the door. Biddeford's deep voice bade him enter. But when he stepped into the room the Captain was on his high stool at the chart-table, and Miss Morris, with a slight bow to McGuire, proceeded out of the cabin without a word.

The wireless man looked keenly into the Captain's face. There was something truculent in his gaze.

"Well," he said slowly and significantly, "I managed to put that all right—the machine, I mean."

No change of expression was visible on Biddeford's countenance.

"Oh," he enquired; "what was wrong with it?"

"She changed the poles of the magneto."

"Did you send a message?" enquired Biddeford.

"You bet your life I did!"

The Captain's eyes narrowed; to conceal his expression he turned his head a little.

Presently McGuire said haltingly:

"There is something more I want to say about this message, Captain."

"Well?"

"It's about that reward of ten thousand dollars."

For a moment the Captain said nothing, and McGuire passed a hand over his thin, sallow jaws.

"What about it?" Biddeford asked.

"I want to make it clear, Captain, that I was the first person to identify Miss Morris. The money's mine, Captain!"

Biddeford slid from the stool and stood looking at him. His hands, hanging at his sides, closed; his chin slowly projected; his eyes traveled over McGuire's long,

lean figure from head to foot—from his black hair, his sallow face, to his feet, and up again.

"Yes, you swine," he said deliberately, "if the money's anybody's, it's yours."

McGuire looked startled.

"It's got to go to somebody, and I may as well——"

"Bloodmoney," said the Captain.

"Call it bloodmoney if you like," returned McGuire. "It's mine, anyway; I sent the message and signed it——"

In a flash and with tiger-like ferocity Biddeford was across the cabin. His big hands closed about McGuire's throat. He put out all his strength and squeezed the fellow's neck. Then the primal instinct to take McGuire's life left him. Slowly and reluctantly he relaxed his grip. Then, as he gave the wireless man a push that sent him staggering towards the door, he said hoarsely:

"Get out of my cabin!"

McGuire, whose mouth was open, who was fingering his collar and staring, went out without a word. In the darkness outside he paused to pull himself together. His blood still throbbed in his temples; there was still a singing in his ears. The power of Biddeford's grip on his throat had been terrific, and there had been something in Biddeford's face that he had never seen before. All the same, Biddeford was a fool, and was letting this woman twist him round her fingers. That scene he had witnessed through the porthole suddenly flashed through his mind. He had at first been too occupied with his own plans to think of its significance, but now——

For a few minutes he halted outside the chart-house door, settling his disordered collar and tie. Then softly he moved away along the deck to his own cabin. Here, as

he stepped inside and switched on the light, a gleam of triumph glowed in his eyes. After all, he had got out a message. Despite Miss Morris's cunning and the Captain's peculiar behaviour, he had succeeded. He had made known to the police the fact that the wanted woman, Edna Morris, was aboard the *Lachine*.

CHAPTER IV

AT six o'clock next morning McGuire leapt out of sleep to the hoarse, tearing screams of the ship's siren. He had not slept well. There had been long hours during the night when he had lain gloating over the brilliant future which unfolded itself before him. Never in his life had he played his cards so well. And the fact that matters were to come to a head in the next few hours thrilled him mightily.

He reached out and switched on the electric light, then went to the porthole and looked out. A heavy blanket of fog surrounded the vessel. It was still dark, but he could see the fog whitely pressed against the thick glass of the porthole. And the pulsations of the ship's engines had been reduced. They were going, he surmised, at something less than half speed. And he did not like that. His one desire in life was to see the *Lachine* safely in Liverpool Dock, and to witness the coming aboard of Chief Detective Inspector Mulready. He visualized Mulready now as he would come aboard in his long Melton overcoat, his bowler hat, black moustache, and rosy cheeks like a girl. Mulready had been responsible for more arrests on incoming liners than any of his predecessors. The captain of every passenger-carrying vessel that put in at Liverpool knew him by sight. McGuire knew him. It was to Mulready by name that he had sent his message.

McGuire was dressed by now, and, pulling on his cap,

he went out on to the deck. The fog rose before him like a white wall as he opened his cabin door. The deck was wet and slippery beneath his feet. He began to make his way aft, guiding himself by the deck-house rail. Something prompted him to make his way towards Miss Morris's state-room. He reached it at length, and saw that a light shone beneath her curtained portholes. Then someone collided with him, and a tinkle of china smote his ears. Out of the dense mist a face appeared close to his, the face of the stewardess—a dried, lean woman of forty. She had just emerged from Miss Morris's cabin, carrying a tray and utensils for early morning tea.

"This fog's awful," she said, righting an overturned cup.

"It'll delay us," returned McGuire.

"The Captain says not more than half an hour," said the stewardess; "we shall get in by daylight." She passed him, and instantly vanished from view.

For some minutes McGuire maintained his position outside the stateroom. Then once again he made his way back to his cabin. The thick fog condensed upon his clothes and upon his face and hands. He was cold, but a deep excitement held him. As he made his way hand over hand along the deck, the tearing note of the siren continued its devastating uproar. At intervals of sixty seconds the warning vibrated from end to end of the ship. And in the distance McGuire could hear other vessels calling near and far. They were in the mouth of the Mersey, going at a five-knot speed, with Biddeford himself on the lookout and every officer on deck.

McGuire attained his cabin at last, went inside, and closed the door. It was fifteen minutes past six. He

took a handkerchief from his pocket, wiped his damp face; then, with a hand that shook a little, he chose a cigarette and lit it. For an hour after that he sat waiting as the ship worked her way through the heavy whiteness. The remorseless note of the siren rent his nerves. He wanted a cup of coffee badly, but somehow he felt disinclined to leave his cabin to go below. Daylight came at last. The vessel glided suddenly clear of the fog. McGuire intensely excited, rose and went out on deck. In the grey light of dawn he could see the distant low buildings ashore. They were already in the midst of the shipping, with hardly any way on.

He turned, crossed the deck, and leaned upon the rail. Then suddenly he became aware of a movement for'ard. Three men had come aboard. Captain Biddeford was there, shaking hands. One of the figures was a man in a bowler hat and a long overcoat, a man with a pink complexion and a long black moustache—Chief Detective Inspector Mulready. With Mulready was a lean, humorous-featured American, who represented the famous Pinkerton Agency.

The group of new arrivals moved across the deck, following the Captain. At the door of the chart-house Biddeford halted, threw it open, and ushered the party within. McGuire watched them go.

"I thought you'd like to attend to matters in here," said Biddeford, glancing at Mulready, and at the same time pressing his finger on the bell.

The Inspector nodded and glanced about the chart-room.

"This suits me all right, Captain." He made a signal to his two subordinates, who seated themselves on the

locker. Then the door opened and the chief steward came in.

"Marwood," ordered Captain Biddeford, "go to Miss Morris's stateroom and tell her I shall be glad to have a word with her as soon as possible."

The steward turned to the door, and as he went Mulready intervened.

"Don't say anything, steward, but that the Captain would like to see her."

"Very good, sir," Marwood answered.

When the door had closed, Mulready talked trivialities to Biddeford for a few minutes. But neither he nor the Captain were in the mood for light conversation, and Mulready, despite his long experience, was conscious of the acute tension of those moments. In a few seconds now he would make the initial move in a *cause célèbre* of intense dramatic interest.

Five long minutes passed. The four men waited in varying degrees of impatience. Mulready began to pace the floor, pulling at his moustache. Another minute passed, and the Inspector, without reference to the Captain, strode across the chart-house and pressed his thumb heavily on the bell. As he did so, footsteps were heard running swiftly along the deck. A moment after, the door abruptly opened. On the threshold stood the chief steward, breathless, and with a scared face.

"There's no sign of Miss Morris anywhere aboard, sir," he exclaimed; "we've searched everywhere. Mrs. Adams, the stewardess, found this letter for you in her cabin, sir."

He held out an envelope on which was written in a bold feminine hand, "Captain Martin Biddeford, s.s. *Lachine*."

Biddeford tore open the envelope, the three detectives crowding about him, and in the twinkle of an eye all Mulready's pose of a phlegmatic and easy-going manner vanished. He had become suddenly a man on wires, his senses pinioned on that momentous epistle.

"Well?" he sharply demanded.

From the envelope the Captain had withdrawn a single sheet of note paper, on which were written a few words in a large feminine hand:

"Dear Captain Biddeford. Many thanks and—good-bye.—E. M."

Biddeford scrutinized the sheet, turning it back and front with puzzled eyes. That brief and enigmatic message was all it contained—not a line, not a word more. Mulready, with a startled exclamation, seized the letter and dashed impetuously out of the chart-house. The others followed him *en masse* along the deck.

In fifty seconds they were in Miss Morris's state-room. Everything was in order. There were no signs whatever of hurried departure. Miss Morris's sole visible possession was the bright yellow suit-case with her initials "E. M." stamped on its surface. Mulready fell upon it with the swift ferocity of a vulture. The case was not locked, and, slipping back the catch, Mulready raised the lid. A dress or two met his gaze, and delicately and neatly folded articles of feminine lingerie. With masculine and untutored roughness, he shook out each item of wear and flung it aside. No documents or papers of any kind revealed themselves.

The detective glanced up at Biddeford.

"Who saw Miss Morris last?" he enquired curtly.

"The stewardess probably took her a cup of tea first thing this morning," Biddeford answered.

"I would like to see the stewardess, Captain."

Biddeford put his head out of the cabin and called an order along the deck to the steward. Two minutes later the stewardess appeared.

"You sent for me, Captain?" she enquired.

Biddeford nodded.

"Mr. Mulready here wants to have a word with you, Mrs. Adams; come in and shut the door."

The stewardess, a woman with sensitive features, and the sallow, enervated appearance of one who has spent years in the tropics, obediently entered. Her brown and liquid-looking eyes wandered from one to another of the four large men who occupied the stateroom. Detective Inspector Mulready stepped forward.

"Miss Morris, who was aboard this morning, is apparently not aboard now." He looked piercingly at her for a moment, then added swiftly: "I suppose, Mrs. Adams, you have no idea where she is at this moment?"

"None whatever, sir."

"Miss Morris is wanted for a murder committed in New York fifteen days ago," continued Mulready.

Mrs. Adams had gone as white as her sallow skin permitted. The hand which was put up now to smooth back the hair on her forehead shook visibly.

"I had no idea of that, sir."

"No, I expect you had not. It was a secret known only to the Captain and the wireless operator. Now," he said—he suddenly shook his finger at her and adopted

a less judicial tone—"I want you to help me and my police colleagues here to find Miss Morris."

He held up the letter found in the girl's cabin.

"Do you know anything of this letter?"

"No sir, only that I found it in Miss Morris's state-room."

"When did you last see Miss Morris?"

"At six o'clock this morning. I brought her a cup of tea."

"Was she dressed?"

"No, sir; she was in her berth."

"She spoke to you?"

"Only to ask when we should get in."

"Miss Morris seemed anxious to arrive at Liverpool?" asked Mulready carelessly.

"No, sir, she seemed sorry the voyage was over; she was restless, sir, and nervous."

"She did not confide in you in any way during the voyage?"

"No, sir."

Mulready put a few further questions, and then dismissed Mrs. Adams and turned his attention energetically to a thorough search of the vessel. Mr. James Park, the American detective, accompanied by Mulready's subordinate, Captain Biddeford, and Mrs. Adams, were despatched to begin a systematic combing of the ship in search of the missing passenger. Mulready lingered on the deck to think things out. He was not at all satisfied. There was something in the manner of the Captain and of Mrs. Adams, the stewardess, which appeared to him to lack the perfect ring of candour. Possibly, in Mrs. Adams's case, however, the timid nature of the woman confronted

by three formidable detectives might account for her agitation. But in regard to Biddeford, he was not at ease.

Mulready, with a glance along the deck, prepared to go below, when his eyes encountered McGuire. Fixing him with his cold, interrogating glance, Mulready demanded: "Well, Mr. McGuire, what do you make of this?"

McGuire, who had picked up the news from the steward, smiled wryly.

"Miss Morris was aboard at six o'clock this morning—that's all I know about it."

"Yes; I had that from the stewardess."

"What's the Captain think?" asked McGuire. He managed to convey in his tone something which was not lost upon the detective.

"How do you mean?" he demanded.

"I guess it's his business to know about her," returned McGuire.

There was a silence between them which became significant.

Mulready suddenly dropped his voice.

"If there's anything at the back of your mind in regard to the Captain——"

"Oh, it's nothing," McGuire said. He walked to the rail and leaned with back against it, crossing his long legs and standing with hands in pockets.

Mulready followed him.

"Now," he pursued in an urgent voice, "let's hear it."

"It's nothing, I tell you," protested McGuire again; "only one or two things I've noticed coming over."

He hesitated again, then gave a brief but detailed nar-

rative of certain significant incidents that had occurred during the voyage.

Ten minutes later Mulready left the wireless operator with a curt nod of thanks, and joined Biddeford and the others in the search of the ship.

Down below, Detective Mulready made a point of standing near Biddeford. Whatever suspicions he may have had of Biddeford, he was obliged to admit to himself that the Captain's search of his vessel was thorough and genuine.

When the party at length emerged upon the upper deck after a fruitless search, the stewardess ventured towards them, looking neat and trim in her white apron and cap. Mulready saw immediately that she desired to say something.

"Well?" he encouraged her.

"I don't think, sir," her words came quickly in a rush—"I don't think we shall ever find Miss Morris."

"Why not?"

"It's my belief that she was too terrified to face the landing, sir, and threw herself overboard in the fog."

Captain Biddeford started.

"That is merely your own opinion, Mrs. Adams?" enquired Mulready quietly.

"Yes, sir; but the more I think of it, the more sure I am."

"Thank you, stewardess," he said, breaking a silence that had become portentous. "But that does not exonerate us from making a thorough search of the ship." He waited a moment, then said kindly: "Is there anything more you can tell us that might help us in our search?"

"Nothing, sir." She hesitated a moment, then quietly

withdrew. The moment the door closed upon her, Mr. Park of New York put a question to the company :

"What do you make of that woman?" His eyes traveled from Biddeford to Mulready.

"Scared to death," Mulready answered.

In the meanwhile the stewardess, a neat and slender figure in her white cap and large white apron, made her way aft and descended to her own cabin, below deck on the starboard side.

She entered the little apartment with a tense expression of countenance, which vanished the moment she was inside and had locked the door behind her. Then, with a swift, convulsive movement, with fingers that shook slightly, she unfastened three buttons at the neck of her dress and drew forth one after another ten American notes, each of one hundred dollars. She counted the notes, one to ten, with an air of deep preoccupation. This done, she sat for a moment looking about her in a state of hysterical excitement; then, leaping to her feet, snatched back the bedclothes, dragged up the narrow mattress, and drew its end towards her. In another moment a pair of glittering, pointed scissors were in her fingers. With dexterous feminine skill, she began the operation of opening the ticking at the mattress foot. In a very few moments she had severed the threads in its entire width. Then she took up a hundred-dollar note and thrust it within the aperture she had made. She took up a second, a third, and a fourth note, and laid each flat and separate from its fellow. Her long, thin arms shot in and out of the aperture with almost rhythmic regularity. Then, when every note had been laid creaselessly in concealment, she took up a needle and thread and began to sew,

copying to perfection the original stitching of the mattress. Her task completed, she ran sensitive fingers over the ticking. She had effectively hidden one thousand American dollars.

CHAPTER V

MR. JAMES PARK, the American detective, of the humorous face, who had boarded the *Lachine* with Mulready, was in London, in occupation of a slightly austere Louis XV apartment in a fashionable Strand hotel. His window overlooked the Thames. His view comprised advertisements for whisky, a red and tailless lion surmounting a pickle factory, and in the pearly distance, on sunny days, the glitter of the Crystal Palace roof.

The time was six o'clock in the evening, and the setting sun was achieving superb Turner-like effects, wherein the fine outline of the Houses of Parliament figured in glowing, dusky silhouette. The view has been said to be the finest on earth; but Mr. Park was not occupied with the view. His mind was sordidly engaged in the act of composing a report to his employers—and a report of failure. This unusual and unpleasant fact irked him considerably. Nevertheless, the duty had to be faced.

He withdrew his hands from his pockets, his eyes from the view, and, seating himself on one of the fragile Louis XV. chairs which the Golden Pavilion Hotel provides for its guests, he drew another chair towards him. On the second chair was a portable typewriter furnished with a virgin sheet of paper. Mr. Park reached forward and typed out the date; then he paused again and lit a cigar. Every two days he furnished his employers in New York with a report of his doings. Six days had elapsed since

the *Lachine* reached Liverpool, and nothing had been discovered of the whereabouts of Miss Edna Morris.

On the day of his departure from Liverpool, Mr. Park had said sententiously to Detective Mulready: "If Miss Morris went overboard in the fog, she went over. But my opinion of Miss Morris is that she did nothing of the kind. If we want to solve the mystery, there are three persons we must watch—the Captain of the *Lachine*, the stewardess, and the wireless operator."

In this view of the case Detective Mulready had concurred. The two men then had agreed to divide forces, and it had fallen to Mr. Park's lot to personally shadow Captain Biddeford. In his own mind the American was convinced that if he hung on to Biddeford the mystery would eventually resolve itself.

* * * *

Captain Biddeford had been in London two days. On the second evening, having dined, he went by bus to occupy a seat he had purchased at the Victoria Music Hall. At eleven o'clock he emerged from the music-hall, and took a bus back to his hotel; he had had a pleasant and satisfactory evening, and was in excellent humor with himself as he entered the dim portal of his hotel. Out of the gloom the night porter advanced towards him.

"I beg your pardon, sir, but somebody's been ringing you up."

Biddeford turned sharply.

"What name?" he demanded.

"They would give no name, sir, but said they would ring up at eleven-twenty."

Biddeford took out his watch. It was eleven-fifteen exactly, and five minutes later, to the minute, the hall telephone pealed out its summons.

With a glance at the porter, Biddeford took up the receiver. A voice, musical and deep, but a feminine voice, reached him.

"Is that Captain Biddeford?"

"Yes."

A low cadence of laughter greeted his answer.

"Do you know me?"

"I can guess who you are," responded Biddeford, dissembling his amazement.

"Listen," she said.

Biddeford listened, and the voice of Miss Edna Morris, uttering brief and hurried sentences, sounded in his ears. In a few moments Miss Morris had given her address in a block of mansions in Bedford Square, and had invited him to come there that night—to come immediately, on a matter of importance.

Within twelve minutes—almost to the stroke of the half-hour, in fact—Biddeford's taxi wheeled into Bedford Square, and drew towards a somber edifice of flats. A second taxi, that had followed him all the way, swept into the Square almost immediately behind him.

Captain Biddeford alighted upon the pavement, and, with gloves and stick in hand, surveyed the vast, dark precipice of stone which towered above him. At that late hour the Square was almost deserted. The number of the flat given him was 115, and as he entered the building he noticed that the lift was in darkness, and had ceased to operate for the night.

Without a moment's hesitation, he began to ascend the

carpeted stairs, glancing at the numbers on each landing as he passed—115 proved to be on the third floor, along a dim corridor.

The number "115" in enamelled letters upon a mahogany colored door confronted him. His fingers sought the bell, and as if in instant response to his touch, for the bell had not even sounded, the mahogany door opened before him. He caught a vista of a narrow hall, illuminated in rose-colored light, and beneath the light, awaiting him, attired in a superb gown, was Miss Edna Morris herself.

"So you were not afraid to come?"

She looked up, smiling brilliantly into his face; but even then Biddeford observed that she was intensely alert, as she had always been aboard the *Lachine*.

With deft fingers she swung the door shut upon oiled hinges, and Biddeford heard the soft click of the latch behind him.

"Do come in." The girl laid a hand on his arm and led him through the narrow, pinkly illuminated hall. At the end of the hall she threw open a door and ushered him into a drawing-room, expensively and inartistically furnished.

Biddeford swept the room with a glance.

An electric chandelier depended from the center of the ceiling, and here also were pink shades, giving out the same roseate light as in the hall. This sickly, cloying illumination did not appeal to Biddeford at all. Constitutionally, he objected to anything in the nature of softly exotic furniture. A special feature of the decorations, which jarred his sensibilities, was a pair of electric blue plush curtains which divided the room from another inner room. Biddeford could see these curtains

reflected in all their garish unsuitability in a tall mirror opposite him.

His eyes were, however, now occupied with Miss Morris. There was no doubt about it, she was an amazingly lovely woman. Surveying her, he detected, he thought, a slight accentuation of darkness in her complexion. The different arrangement of her hair possibly created the idea, or possibly the amber-colored evening dress. But, somehow, there was something Southern about her—Spanish, perhaps.

"Sit down, Captain." She conducted him to a low chair at the hearth, and Biddeford, with a guarded air, took his seat.

"Captain, you are angry with me?"

"Before we go any farther," Biddeford said gravely, "I would like to ask you one question. How did you get off my ship?"

Miss Morris, who had crossed the hearth elegantly, subsided into a chair opposite him.

"If I told you, Captain, I should be betraying the confidence of someone who was kind to me."

"Then you bribed one or more of my crew to help you to trick the police?"

"Why not?" She looked at him squarely and frankly, the fine eyes clear and candid in gaze. "If you had been in my place, Captain, would you have stayed aboard to be arrested on a false charge?"

This was the point that Biddeford had been hoping would arise. He seized it swiftly.

"How did you know any charge was to be made against you?"

"On the night Mr. McGuire ran along the deck with his

eyes staring out of his head, I guessed he had picked up a message about me," she answered calmly.

"And after that," put in Biddeford remorselessly, "you tampered with my wireless?"

"I admit that was wrong of me, Captain."

"It was an indictable offence," Biddeford returned.

"It was foolish, too, for it didn't help me, as it happened."

"No, it didn't. Then the fact that you wrote a note, thanking me, made the police suspect me of complicity with you."

"Captain, I am so sorry. On the last day of the voyage I was afraid. I was what the Americans call 'rattled.' I was mad to get ashore."

Her tones rang with sincerity. Something of the spell she had first put upon Biddeford aboard the *Lachine* renewed itself in the quiet of the little drawing-room, with its sickly pink light, its heavy, plush curtains, its vulgar and costly furniture. Nevertheless, he was adamant upon the point of duty. He did not for one moment believe her guilty of the charge that had been brought against her. But he was determined to be no party to her escape from custody. He bowed to her, and said formally:

"Miss Morris, anything you did against me I am willing to forgive. On the other hand, I advise you to take the only course open to you to clear up this matter. You must frankly face the situation. The case will look infinitely better for you if you surrender to the police."

Miss Morris heard him in silence, standing before him with hands clenched. Then she said with low, passionate intensity, and a stamp of her foot:

"I tell you I know nothing of the murder of Norman Grant!"

"I am willing to believe it. All the same——"

"I am not the sort of woman to do a thing like that."

She moved towards him, her eyes blazing up into his.

"Can't you see there is more behind this than appears?"

He held to his point.

"Get a good attorney and trust yourself to the protection of the law, Miss Morris; it is the only course——"

She came even nearer, gliding swiftly towards him and speaking in a whisper:

"Oh no; there are other ways. You were kind to me on the *Lachine*; I want you to help me just once more. I am not asking for my own sake alone——"

Biddeford shook his head.

"I wish I could, but it's a matter of duty——"

"Oh, listen!" she whispered. "I want to get out of London, away somewhere where I shall never be heard of again——" She paused, and laid her hands on the lapel of his coat. "You will help me to do that?"

Biddeford gently tried to remove her hands from his shoulders. A minute passed in silence. Then suddenly he saw Miss Morris's eyes move from him and travel over his shoulder towards the plush curtains behind him. Something in her expression caused him to turn.

"What is it?" he asked.

"Nothing," returned the woman. "I only thought I heard a sound—and every sound fills me with terror."

"I thought I heard a sound, too," Biddeford said. He wheeled and moved a pace towards the heavy plush curtains dividing the room from the room beyond. Miss

Morris instantly slipped her arm through his, drawing him back a little.

"It's nothing—it can't be anything; I'm quite alone here."

"I heard something——"

"Listen!" cried Miss Morris imperatively. Her pressure on his arm tightened. Her whole personality centered upon him, her eyes lifted to his. There was tenderness, mystery, and something else in her gaze. He could feel her will contending against his own.

"I want you to help me," she urged. "You do not know how important it is. It is essential the police should never find me." She suddenly became frank. "Truly, it is not for myself I ask; there are other, greater issues—but I dare not tell you." Her face was very near to his, so near that he could feel the warmth of her, and was dazzled by the luminosity of her brilliant eyes. But, under all, he was conscious of something wrong, something impending. Incomprehensibly the garish room had become sinister.

He retreated a step and another step, seeking as he went to release her clinging arms. There was something hurried and unreal in the sound of her words. Her manner began to offend him.

Doubt suddenly leapt up in him. Suspicion of the woman before him became conviction. At the far side of the room was the tall mirror, which reflected himself, the girl, and the electric blue curtains at his back. And suddenly in the depths of this mirror he saw a thing which caused his heart to leap. Immediately behind him the curtains had been quietly parted. In the aperture stood a tall man in evening clothes wearing a gleaming

white shirtfront and a black tie. The man's dark and menacing face was in shadow—but Biddeford had seen enough. He wrenched Miss Morris's clinging fingers away, and with a sweep of his arm sent her reeling across the apartment. He could hear her scream as she fell. That was the last thing he heard. A terrible blow smote him from behind, and even before he could turn a second blow, dealt by a leaded weapon, crashed upon his head. In a blind instinct of self-preservation he staggered forward, reeling like a drunken man. Then sudden, utter, and impenetrable darkness leapt up and enveloped him. He fell to the carpet with a crash and lay still.

CHAPTER VI

MR. PARK, of the Pinkerton Agency, wearing his light grey suit, and with his hat and stick on the carpet beside him, sat in a low chair near the window of the flat in Bedford Square. There was silence in the room, and the grey light of a London dawn softened the garish, inartistic furniture.

Mr. Park's face was turned towards Biddeford lying on a sofa in the shadows of the apartment. In the small hours, when he had shadowed Biddeford to No. 115, and had entered through a door inadvertently left open, he had discovered the lights all full on, and beneath the pink glow of the drawing-room illumination the unconscious form of the Captain. Biddeford was lying face down upon the carpet, and Park's first move upon making this startling discovery had been to close the front door of the flat and make a thorough search for the Captain's assailant. He discovered no one, however. The injured man appeared to be the sole occupant of the premises.

Park, having satisfied himself on this point, summoned the porter of the flats and sent for a doctor. And now Mr. Park was patiently, but with vivid curiosity, waiting for Biddeford to emerge from his long-drawn state of coma.

The American's eyes roved over the garish room and settled contemplatively upon the electric blue plush curtains dividing the drawing-room. From the curtains his gaze passed in turn to the pink shaded lights, the heavy

black marble clock on the mantelpiece, low saddle-back chairs, gimcrack Japanese tables with tawdry covers, and finally came to rest on Biddeford's face. The Captain, covered with a rug taken by Park from the bedroom, was lying on the sofa with his eyes closed.

For some hours the detective had watched at his side, but it was only now that he observed a faint trace of color returning to the injured man's cheeks.

For a few further minutes he watched, and at last Biddeford stirred a little. Park rose, stretched himself, and, moving across the room, stood looking down. Biddeford's lids flickered and his eyes suddenly opened.

"So you are awake?" exclaimed the detective.

"I have been watching you for the last two or three minutes," Biddeford said, drawing himself up on the sofa. Then suddenly a throb of pain twisted his lips. He put a hand to the back of his head, and under heavy dark eyebrows glowered up at the detective.

Park was smiling.

"They got you good and hard there, Captain."

"They did," admitted Biddeford, swinging his feet to the floor. "How did you come to be here?"

"Found the door open and came in," briefly answered Park.

Biddeford, with a sensation of hammers beating inside his head, looked about him, and his eyes fell upon the electric blue curtains. For a moment he gazed at them with a dazed expression.

"I was standing with my back to those curtains," he said slowly at length. "The fellow, whoever he was, pulled them apart, and got me from behind."

"You saw him?" enquired Park, with sharp interest.

"I saw his reflection in that mirror."

"There was a lady here, too, eh?"

"The lady was Miss Morris," said Biddeford heavily.

"Ah!" exclaimed Park, opening his eyes wide, "so the lady was Miss Morris?"

He was silent for a moment or two, as though considering this piece of news, then he said:

"Now, tell me, Captain, how did you get in touch with Miss Morris again?"

"She telephoned my hotel last night," Biddeford explained, "and asked me to come and see her."

"You had heard nothing of her since she got away from the *Lachine*?"

"Nothing."

"You reckoned you walked into a trap last night?"

"It was a trap sure enough, but whether Miss Morris had a hand in what happened or not, I don't know."

"You bet she had a hand in it," returned Park with conviction.

But on this point there was a doubt in Biddeford's mind, for almost the last thing he could recall before sinking into nothingness had been a terrible scream which had issued from Miss Morris's lips, a scream which had not been the result of his blow in sweeping her aside, but of something else—terror, perhaps, at the sudden appearance of the intruder.

"Where is Miss Morris now?" he demanded of Park.

"I guess I'd give a good deal to know that, Captain. The woman is a mystery. The New York police want her for the murder of Norman Grant, I want her for skipping with some papers that don't belong to her, and you want her, Captain—what do you want her for?" He put his

head on one side and looked humorously into Biddeford's face.

For the first time that morning Biddeford smiled.

"I want her to give me the address of the man who was hiding behind the curtains," he said feelingly. A picture of that saturnine figure, his unusually tall assailant, rose in his mind. "I would give a good deal to meet him."

"Well, if I come across him, I will put you in the way of him," Park responded. "But in the meantime you have had a nasty bat over the head, and breakfast would do you good. You will feel the better for a meal, and so shall I. I can't eat much because of my dyspepsia, but I like to eat often."

He picked up his hat, placed his stick under his arm, and began to draw on his gloves.

Biddeford, feeling that there was sense in the suggestion of breakfast, rose shakily, sought his hat, placed it upon his head, and snatched it off again.

"Sore?" enquired Park.

"My head feels as though it were red hot. I'd like to meet the man——"

"Perhaps you will," interjected Park. "Come on."

Then, as the two advanced to the outer door of the flat, a bell whirred suddenly. Mr. Park hurried forward and drew open the front door, revealing on the threshold an elegantly appparelled young man.

The newcomer wore a grey suit which had been built for him, and which fitted his slim figure so flawlessly that he might have been melted and poured into it. Far back upon his head, as though supported on his ears, was a Homburg hat of a delicate grey hue.

Biddeford, whose temper was abraded by the pain in his head, looked at him grimly.

"You are, of course, Captain Martin Biddeford!" exclaimed the young man heartily, holding out a grey-gloved hand.

"I am," said Biddeford. "Who are you?" He ignored the hand.

The young man broadened his smile and ran a gloved finger over a negligible moustache.

"You don't know me, of course?"

"If I did, I would not ask you who you were," retorted Biddeford curtly.

"I'm not offended," said the young man.

"It's the same to me whether you are or not," said Biddeford. "I am going out to breakfast with Mr. Park here, and so far as I am concerned you can go to hell!"

"May I come with you to breakfast instead?" the young man asked. "Mr. Park will kindly introduce me——"

"You are a name and a Bond Street suit to me," responded Mr. Park gravely—"that and nothing more."

The young man looked at him reprovingly.

"You say that, Mr. Park, after our delightful talk of this morning?"

"We talked, sure enough, in the early hours of this morning, but you didn't say much about yourself, Mr. Man," returned the American.

The youth put his hand into the pocket of his perfect coat and drew forth a leather wallet, from which he extracted a card. Biddeford, wondering if he was an insurance agent or a newspaper reporter, took it, and read the neatly engraved words:

"Mr. Sedgely Gornal, The Foreign Office."

Biddeford handed back the card.

"Did you come to see me, Mr. Gornal?"

"Yes. I should be so tremendously obliged if I could have a little chat with you."

Biddeford looked enquiringly at Park.

"Come to breakfast with us," the American invited; "you can talk while the Captain eats."

* * * *

At breakfast, in a quiet restaurant in Oxford Street, a few minutes later, the bright young man babbled aimlessly until Park had finished his meal. Then, when the detective rose and made his departure, he leaned forward towards Biddeford, his face suddenly grave. His earnest manner was in complete contrast to what it had been in Park's presence.

"You know all about Mr. Park, of course?"

"He is a detective, one of Pinkerton's men," Biddeford answered. "He was sent from New York to intercept one of my passengers at Liverpool."

"He failed in his task?"

"He did."

"Miss Morris got away," the young man said quietly. Biddeford looked at him sharply. What did he know of Miss Morris?

"Are you a friend of Miss Morris, Mr. Gornal?"

"Er—no," said Gornal, with a flicker of embarrassment.

"Do you know her?"

"No; I don't know Miss Morris at all."

"Are you a friend of Park?" asked Biddeford. Mr. Gornal was himself again.

"No; I saw Mr. Park for the first time a week ago. He amuses me. Americans always do. I think their accent is so delightful, don't you?"

"I'm not interested in what you think," Biddeford retorted, his mouth still hard; "but as you know so much, perhaps you can tell me something about the man who visited Miss Morris last night?"

"Alas, no!"

"I am anxious to meet him again," said Biddeford, projecting his chin.

"I know someone," said Gornal calmly, "who wants to find him even more urgently than you do."

His manner was so conciliatory that, against his will, Martin's tone softened.

"Who might that someone be?" he asked.

Gornal tapped his polished finger nails on the table and looked contemplatively, with a sort of bird-like enquiry, into Biddeford's face. For a few moments he remained silent. A singular young man, Martin decided, and was not sure whether he would like to knock his head off or shake hands with him!

"Have you?" questioned Mr. Gornal, breaking the pause, "ever heard of Lord Hyde of Codsall?"

Yes; Biddeford had heard of Lord Hyde of Codsall. The whole British Empire, on which the sun never sets, had heard of him. He said so, wondering what the dickens Lord Hyde of Codsall had to do with himself, the polished young man, and the dark assailant who had smitten his cranium.

Lord Hyde of Codsall, Biddeford recalled, was the younger son of a Scottish peer, and had made a name and won himself a peerage for brilliant services to his

party. During the past year something of a sensation had been created by Lord Hyde leaving politics and accepting a salary of £30,000 a year in the service of the Panka Oil Company, a vast concern backed by the Government.

"Yes, of course, I have heard of him," Biddeford said again, "but——"

"I am his secretary," intervened the young man quickly, "and Lord Hyde would very much like to make your acquaintance, Captain."

Biddeford, doubting if he heard aright, fixed him with a cold blue eye.

"Make my acquaintance? What for?"

"He has heard of you, and he admires you."

Biddeford looked at him with gathered brows.

"If you are trying to be funny——" he began.

"No, no," protested Gornal. "Lord Hyde has really heard of you, and my instructions were to find you and bring you at once to him. Could you come now?" he urged.

"What does he want me for?" Biddeford asked, still not realizing that the fates had suddenly become busy with his destiny.

But to his questions Gornal gave evasive answers, and within five minutes he had manœuvred Biddeford out of the restaurant. Almost before the Captain knew it, they had entered a long, low limousine upholstered in dove grey. The vehicle, without Martin's knowledge, had followed them from the flat, and had been waiting for Mr. Gornal's commands all through breakfast.

"Is this your car?" asked Biddeford, subsiding into the cushions.

"It's Lord Hyde's. In a sense it's mine too," returned Gornal. "He lets me use it on special occasions."

"I see," remarked Biddeford; "so this is a special occasion?"

The young man smiled, showing a row of admirable teeth.

"Yes," he said, "it's a special occasion."

* * * *

"Here we are."

Gornal's cheerful voice aroused Biddeford from reverie. The young man sprang out of the car, and Biddeford followed, alighting before a door in St. James' Place, one of London's most unimposing streets, every other house of which is inhabited by a peer of the realm.

Gornal, with a word to the chauffeur, slipped a key into the door and escorted Biddeford through a short hall into an oak-pannelled apartment—the well of the house—lit by a large skylight. The staircase ascending from here led to galleries, giving access to the upper rooms.

A footman emerged from the shadows.

"His lordship," he said immediately to Gornal, "is waiting in the library, sir. He will see you at once."

The servant, accepting Biddeford's hat, stick, and gloves, laid them on an oak table, then preceded the visitors up the stairs. Upon the first floor he swung open a door.

"Mr. Gornal, my lord," he announced.

A moment later Biddeford found himself in a book-lined apartment overlooking Green Park. At a desk near a window at the far end of the room, with a telephone

at his right hand, was seated a stout man of fifty. This personage turned his head sharply as the two entered, and Biddeford observed that he was not only stout, but tall—an immense fellow, in fact, with a round cherubic face like a baby, a good nose, and a moustache which covered rather thick lips.

Biddeford had seen his picture a score of times in the illustrated press, but he had never expected to meet this brilliant nobleman.

"You are Captain Biddeford, eh?"

"Yes."

"It is very good of you to come."

"Not at all," Biddeford remarked vaguely, wondering why he had come and how Lord Hyde came to know of his existence.

"They tell me, Captain," went on Lord Hyde, "that you have been having extraordinary adventures."

"Well, things have been happening," Biddeford admitted, with a smile.

"So I hear."

"As a matter of fact, Lord Hyde, they are happening now."

The great man raised his eyebrows enquiringly.

"In what way, Captain?"

"Well, the fact of your sending for me is an interesting adventure in itself."

"I see." Lord Hyde's smile was very attractive. "It's amiable of you to put it like that."

His eyes had been fixed steadily on Biddeford's countenance.

"Please sit down, Captain. You can go, Gornal."

The irreproachable youth removed himself from the

room, and Biddeford took a chair near the statesman's desk.

Lord Hyde was silent for a few seconds, then he drew forward a sheet of paper which reposed on his blotting-pad.

"This," he continued, holding up and showing a few lines of typewriting, "is a little document, the existence of which I hope you will pardon when I have made clear my reason for obtaining it."

Biddeford's quick eye, glancing at the document, saw his own name.

"May I ask what the document is, Lord Hyde?" he asked.

"It is your personal history, Captain, your *dossier*, in fact, but I can assure you," he added quickly and apologetically, "I secured it with no wish to be idly curious."

The sensation of mystery which had been upon Biddeford all the morning deepened again.

"Yours is a very excellent record, Captain," continued the peer, "and on the strength of it I intend later to make you an offer which may appeal to you. In the meantime, we will return to the personage who attacked you last night. You have no idea who the man was?"

"None at all."

"I suppose you would welcome a chance of becoming even with the gentleman?"

"I would jump at it," Biddeford returned, with a sudden gleam in his eye.

Lord Hyde noted the gleam with satisfaction and went on:

"I am pleased to hear you say that."

He laid aside the *dossier* that had surprised and, in fact,

a little ruffled Biddeford, drew a sheet of paper towards him, and with a gold-cased fountain-pen wrote several words upon it. "I have written here," he explained, "the name of the man whom I believe to be your assailant. Please be good enough to read it."

Biddeford took the sheet and read:

"Sebastian Luis Alverado, Ritz Hotel."

Lord Hyde, who was regarding Biddeford closely, spoke after a few moments' pause.

"You will remember that name, Captain?"

"Is it the name of the man who was in Miss Morris' flat?"

"I believe it is, but you shall judge for yourself."

"May I ask, Lord Hyde, why you also want to find this man?"

"At present," answered the peer, "I would rather not answer that question; but if the man who assaulted you, and the man whose name is written on that card, are the same, come back to me, and we will go further into the matter."

He rose and held out a cordial hand.

Two minutes later Biddeford was making his way downstairs to the oak-panelled reception-hall. Here he found Gornal awaiting him; the young man came briskly forward.

"Everything all right?" he enquired.

"Yes," Biddeford answered. "You are to come to the Ritz with me and look for a man called Alverado."

He took his hat, stick, and gloves from the dark oak table as he spoke, and, Gornal slipping an arm through his, the two moved towards the street. At that moment a footman issued from an inner door and crossed the

hall, carrying on his arm a lady's fur coat—a long chinchilla coat.

Biddeford stood stock still and stared.

"What's wrong?" demanded Gornal.

"That coat," said Biddeford.

He freed himself from Gornal's arm and strode towards the footman. He would have sworn in any court of law that the article before him was the identical chinchilla coat Miss Morris had worn aboard the *Lachine*.

"Come, Captain, the car's waiting," said Gornal, following swiftly and sliding his arm through Biddeford's again.

"That coat," asseverated Biddeford stubbornly, "is the one Miss Morris wore aboard my ship."

"I'll bet you," Gornal retorted promptly, "I'll count half a dozen coats like that in Bond Street any winter afternoon. What do you say, Carlton?" he asked, laughing and turning towards the footman.

"I should think it very likely, sir," responded the man gravely.

Three minutes later, under Mr. Gornal's deft management, Biddeford was in a softly upholstered corner of Lord Hyde's dove grey limousine. And the limousine, with the easy facility of a car that has cost three thousand guineas, noiselessly ascended St. James's Street.

No word was spoken, and Biddeford, laughing at himself for thinking that there was only one chinchilla coat in the world, let his thoughts turn to his assailant. A contest, any sort of contest, between himself and this predatory individual appealed to all his instinctive love of fight. But why was Lord Hyde also interested in him? How came the man to be in Miss Morris's flat? Was

Miss Morris guilty of the crime imputed to her? Where was Miss Morris now?

He checked himself, for the great car drew to a sudden halt at the entrance of the Ritz. Mr. Sedgely Gornal alighted briskly and preceded him into the hotel. With a friendly greeting to the resplendent hall porter, Gornal made his way to the restaurant. It was lunch time, and the apartment overlooking Green Park was crowded.

Taking up a discreet and strategic position at the entrance, the young man swept his eyes over the many tables. In a moment his gaze became fixed. He uttered a slight exclamation and drew Biddeford forward. His eyes were turned towards the fourth table near the window. Four men occupied this table. One of them, even seated, was a head taller than the others. This man's face was long, olive-tinted, and, in a hard way, handsome. His hair, smooth, shiny, and black, looked as though it had been lacquered.

Gornal spoke softly into Biddeford's ear.

"Is that your man, Captain?"

"Yes."

Biddeford drew in his breath sharply. An impulse that was almost irresistible came to him to stride across the room, seize the man by the ear, and drag him from his chair.

At that moment either an instinct or a sense of danger drew the tall man's attention. He turned and across the width of the room his eyes and the eyes of Biddeford met.

CHAPTER VII

"COME away, Captain," Gornal whispered anxiously in Biddeford's ear. "You will have your chance later."

Biddeford was still looking fixedly across the room into the face of his enemy.

"Is that Lord Hyde's man?" he asked, without turning his head.

"Yes, that's Sebastian Alverado," Gornal answered. "Come." He slid his arm through Biddeford's and gently drew him away.

Ten minutes later they were both back in St. James's Place. Both young men ascended immediately to Lord Hyde's library.

"Well," exclaimed the peer as the two entered his apartment, "and what of Señor Alverado?"

"The man at the Ritz whom Mr. Gornal pointed out to me as Alverado is the man who assaulted me last night," answered Biddeford promptly.

"Ah, excellent!" exclaimed Lord Hyde. "Then I was right in my surmise."

He had risen at Biddeford's entrance, but now reseated himself and signalled Gornal to leave the room. When the door had closed upon that polished young man, he folded his hands on his ample waistcoat and turned his gaze full upon Biddeford. "Now, Captain, we are alone, and I can go into the question of this man and why I think you can be of service to me." He leaned back in

his chair, and began to talk in a quiet, confidential tone, and so informally that Biddeford could hardly believe himself in the presence of one of the keenest intellects in the service of the Government. But it was not so much the great man's tone as the content of his speech that held Biddeford.

"My interest in the man Alverado," said Lord Hyde, "is purely an impersonal one. He has possessed himself, or is supposed to have possessed himself, of an article purchased by the Government from an American called Norman Grant, who was the head of the Norman Grant Oil Company——"

Biddeford stirred in his chair and put in quietly:

"A Norman Grant was shot in his office a few weeks ago."

Lord Hyde bowed.

"Sebastian Alverado is suspected of several crimes," he remarked significantly. "He or his accomplice may have murdered Grant. My interest, however, is centred solely upon the oil concession conceded to Mr. Grant by the Mexican Government, and secretly purchased by us. It is the largest and most valuable concession ever conceded by Mexico. The manner in which we induced Mr. Grant to part with it is a romance in itself."

He paused.

"You follow me, Captain?"

Biddeford was silent for a moment.

"You believe that Señor Alverado has this document?"

"Exactly, Captain, and my suggestion is that you should get it from him. You will find this task interesting and not unremunerative. You have already had a taste of Señor Alverado's quality. It is perhaps now your turn

to give him a taste of yours. You will find your man, not in London, as you may expect, but in a village on the Durham coast. Alverado and three friends bought tickets for Scarthoe this morning, and from other enquiries I have made I learn that he has rented an old manor house situated on Scarthoe Head. The place has been empty for many years, and there are no signs that Alverado is occupying it. In my opinion, however, he is probably using the house as a hiding place until his plans, whatever they are, are matured. He and his compatriots will then slip abroad from West Hartlepool or some other port on that coast."

He lit a cigar, offered one to Biddeford, and, leaning back in his chair, talked for half an hour, throwing much light on the activities of Señor Alverado.

When at length Biddeford rose to go he felt that a new era had opened before him. But there was still a singing in his head from Alverado's blow and there were many things unexplained. As a solatium for these things, however, was the fact that he was now one of Lord Hyde's "young men."

A taxi carried him back to his hotel in Buckingham Street, and the first thing he did when he reached his rooms was to call for a railway guide and look up trains to the North.

CHAPTER VIII

EARLY next morning Martin Biddeford found himself reclining comfortably in the corner of a first-class carriage. His head was better, the sun was joyously shining, and in his pocket reposed the sum of ninety-two pounds odd, the balance of a cheque for one hundred pounds given him by Lord Hyde by way of expenses.

Scarthoe, on the Durham coast, the village of his destination, was merely a name to him, but the possibility of meeting his assailant there invested the place with a pleasant aura of romance and adventure. Yes, he very much wanted to straighten matters with the tall Mexican who had stepped so dexterously from behind the curtain.

The journey North seemed to him interminable, and it was eleven o'clock at night before the train arrived at an utterly desolate little station. Gusts of wind from the sea caused ill-protected gas lamps to flare, giving a blue and ineffective illumination.

Martin was the only passenger to alight, and almost before he had reached the platform the sole porter began to turn off the gas lamps, and purposefully made ready to close the station for the night.

"I want to get to the inn," called Biddeford; "is that far?"

"Matter of ten minutes," the porter answered.

The man was tired and uninterested, and Biddeford, carrying his suit-case, made his way along a bare, wind-

driven road towards the village. Here, in the deserted-looking main street, he found the Boar, a timbered hostelry, with an overhanging upper story. The landlord received his explanation that he had come by the last train with commiseration, and offered him a low-ceilinged, oak-beamed room, with small leaded window-panes, looking upon the High Street.

"We've got a bigger room, sir," said the landlord, as Martin expressed his satisfaction, "but it was taken yesterday by an American gentleman."

"This," said Biddeford, "will suit me nicely."

He went to bed, and slept without dreams. At eight o'clock next morning he had already breakfasted and was out on the sea-front road. For ten minutes he walked forward until the road began to ascend, climbing the three hundred feet ascent of Scarthoe Head. On his right was the sea, grey and whitecapped in the morning light. A solitary liner, looking low in the water, marked the rim of the horizon. By its silhouette he knew the ship's name, her captain, tonnage, and route. And he wondered what Captain Horribin would say if he knew of his present strange quest and occupation. A fortnight ago Martin had believed himself inalienably wedded to the sea, but now . . .

He looked out at the liner wallowing in the heavy waters, and a smile crossed his face. Some day, when he had finished his mission for Lord Hyde, he would have a yarn with old Horribin about it all. He could see Horribin's face as he listened to the history of that beautiful woman of mystery, Miss Morris. He could hear the old shellback's laugh as he confessed to the crack on the head he had received in Miss Morris's flat, his gaping

amazement at the part where Lord Hyde began to figure in the story.

Half an hour later Biddeford obtained his first view of Scarthoe House. Even from where he stood it looked desolate and unkempt. The many windows in the front of the mansion were shielded by drawn blinds; no smoke issued from the chimneys. He turned and, walking inland across wind-swept fields of sparse grass, approached the house. A high wall enclosed the domain. Heavy iron gates, in a state of decay, opened upon a small lodge, overgrown with creepers. Looking through the bars, he could see the house at the end of a short drive. Upon closer inspection, the place was even more deserted in appearance than he had at first thought.

He began to doubt if Lord Hyde had been right, after all, in his information. There was no sign whatever of life about the place, and, with the blinds drawn as they were, the interior must be in darkness. Of course, as a hiding-place, Scarthoe House possessed great possibilities. But for what purpose could the man Alverado require such a place? Martin turned to the right and began a tour of the entire property. The back of the house looked as uninviting as the front; and when Martin went away an hour later, he felt vaguely disappointed that no startling discovery had been vouchsafed him. Nevertheless, recalling his interview with Lord Hyde, he knew that he had not been sent to Scarthoe for nothing, and that a man like Hyde generally knew what he was talking about.

Some time or other, he told himself, he would have to search the interior of the mansion; and when he had eaten a good supper at the inn that night, and was sitting over a cigar in the coffee-room, the idea came to him that

it would be safer to explore the house in darkness than in daylight. For if Alverado and his confederates happened to be there, a light would probably be visible, and he would have a chance of coming upon them without himself being observed.

The idea so attracted him that he could not wait a day longer to put it into execution, and when he had finished his cigar he strode off again in the direction of Scarthoe House. An hour's walk brought him to the gate of the mansion.

The night was clear and starlit, and within five minutes he had reached a place in the wall he had noticed earlier in the day. It was easy to ascend here, and in a few moments he had climbed the top and was standing among long, rank weeds in the garden itself. Keeping in the shadow of the trees, he cautiously approached the house and, following a plan he had made in the morning, passed round to the back of the building.

The desolation of the place as he passed under its towering walls was more oppressive, more eerie and sinister than in the daytime. Two sounds broke the stillness—the restless voice of the wind and the creak of a hinge, as though a shutter swung to and fro.

Reaching the window in an outhouse off the kitchen, he easily slipped back the window-catch with his seaman's knife. A moment later he was in a little apartment in utter darkness. Groping his way forward across a kitchen, he drew open a door and found himself in what he took to be a passage. Here he waited a long time, listening, then struck a match. In the yellow flare of light a long vista of corridor stretched before him, with a staircase at

the end, and the open hearth of an ancient chimney on his left.

Extinguishing his light, he passed along this corridor and ascended to the first floor. He decided to strike no more matches, but moved noiselessly forward, groping his way past door after door. He became conscious of sounds now—the strange inexplicable sounds which exist always in old and deserted houses. Added to these was a curious moaning, which he rightly judged to be the sound of the wind in the great Tudor chimney. Still in intense darkness, he groped his way along the first floor, passing a further row of doors. And at each door he paused, making a close inspection for any chink of light, either under the door or through the keyhole. But there was no light, no sign of life anywhere. He reached the third floor at last, and had traversed half its length, when the wind that moaned and echoed in the chimney seemed to take on a new quality of sound. Arrested by this fact, he groped his way back and felt the outline of the hearth with his hands.

Had his hearing been at fault? He listened with head thrust into the gaping chimney-space. Then again, mingling with the unmistakable voice of the wind, came that other sound.

Instinctively he put a hand behind his ear and again leaned forward. Amazement quickened his pulse-beat. There was no doubt whatever now that he was listening to a human voice!

With infinite caution, he moved farther forward and looked up the vast chimney. Complete darkness presented itself. But still the voice continued. The speaker was too far away for words to define themselves, yet near enough

to convince Martin beyond doubt that somewhere within a few yards of where he stood at that moment a man was talking. And as he listened it flashed into his mind that wherever the speaker was, there also would be a light.

With this in mind, he pushed back the catch of one of a score of windows on that floor, raised the blind, drew it open, and leaned out.

Away in the park the wind swayed the tree-tops against the dark sky, and it was the wind which revealed the thing for which he searched. An ivy leaf trembling in the blackness below him suddenly and momentarily became illumined by a beam of light. The light issued from a designedly hidden window in the Tudor chimney. The whole exterior of the mansion was covered with an old growth of ivy, and Martin wondered if he should risk a descent. His hands began to grope among the ivy, testing the weight it would stand; then, without further thought, he climbed out. He descended, and as he descended he made a slight detour, so that he might himself not come into that beam of emerging light.

He accomplished the descent at length, and, leaning far to the left, slipped his hand in among the ivy and drew it cautiously aside. A long lancet-shaped window, not more than twelve inches wide and five feet high, presented itself. Disappointment overswept him. A yellow holland blind had been lowered, which obscured the illuminated room within.

Biddeford, perilously aloft like a fly on the face of the mansion, bent nearer and began to pass his hand over the exterior of the leaded glass, testing the panes. Presently his fingers came into contact with a diamond pane which seemed less fixed than its fellows. He tried

it again, and noted that it seemed slightly loose and had slipped, leaving an aperture of an eighth of an inch on the upper part. Withdrawing his clasp knife from his pocket, and inserting the blade between the lead and the frame, he cautiously drew aside the edge of the blind. A fragment of the room became visible—this and the sleeve and hand of an individual, whose murmurous voice was audible. The speaker was evidently standing, leaning against a dark panelled wall. A moment later he moved, and Martin laughed softly in the darkness.

The man was Alverado!

* * * *

Half an hour later Biddeford strode into the coffee-room of the Boar Inn. He was buttoned up in his overcoat, his hat was on the back of his head, and his cigar decorated the corner of his mouth. He was so absorbed in the discovery he had made at Scarthoe House that it was some moments before he noticed a man seated before the roaring fire, who looked at him with a quizzical smile on his humorous face.

"I guess you have had a pleasant walk, Captain?"

"Very" responded Biddeford, staring at Detective Park, and hiding his amazement. "How did you get here?"

"Been here since yesterday. I'm the American gentleman in the big room next to yours."

Martin rang the bell for a drink.

He was puzzled at Park's presence in Scarthoe, but was determined not to show it. The fair-haired barman appeared.

"Rum hot and a slice of lemon," ordered Biddeford.

"Yes, sir." The barman crossed the parlor and handed

him a letter. "This came while you were out to-night, sir."

Martin scrutinized the envelope back and front. The handwriting was unknown to him.

"Who brought it?" he asked.

"The chauffeur from Everdale House, sir."

At the word "Everdale" Detective Park quickly lifted his eyes and lowered them again,

Martin tore open the envelope and glanced at the signature. The letter was from Lord Hyde's youthful secretary, Sedgely Gornal, and ran:

"MY DEAR CAPTAIN,

"I arrived at Scarthoe to-day, and am staying with my uncle, Colonel Everdale. Lord H. thinks he may be useful to us. The Colonel will be very pleased to see you if you will dine here to-morrow night at seven-thirty. He will send a car for you. I am wondering if you have made any progress in your search for our unpleasant friend."

The letter was signed:

"Yours fraternally,

"SEDGELY GORNAL."

Biddeford smiled as he thought of the writer, and looked forward pleasurably to meeting him again. When he had folded the letter and placed it in his pocket, Mr. Park, who had been keenly watching, turned his eyes to the low oak-beamed ceiling.

"A *billet-doux*?" he questioned.

"Eh?" Biddeford remarked, coming out of his reverie.

"Scented note?" pursued the detective, assuming his humorous and quizzical expression.

"No, it's from a man," said Biddeford.

At that moment the barman entered with Martin's drink; the Captain turned to him.

"Do you know anything about Colonel Everdale?" he enquired.

"Yes, sir," answered the man promptly; "he's the Squire. Lives up at Everdale House, sir."

Park rose and, appearing to take no interest in the conversation, turned his back to them and warmed his hands at the fire.

"Colonel Everdale's been abroad a lot, sir—very well liked gentleman, and so's his lady," volunteered the barman.

"Thanks," Biddeford said, and permitted him to depart.

When the barman had left the room, Detective Park yawned, rubbed his eyes, saying the sea air made him sleepy, and presently removed himself to bed.

Early next morning Biddeford, evading Park, stepped unnoticed out of the inn in pursuance of a plan he had formed, and resumed his observations of Scarthoe House.

As on the previous occasion in daylight, there was nothing to show that the mansion was inhabited. It was dusk when he returned to the Boar to dress for dinner. He had so seldom appeared in evening clothes of late years that he felt a little strange in what he called a "boiled" shirt. At seven o'clock promptly he heard a motor stop at the door of the inn, and the barman appeared to inform him that Colonel Everdale's car was waiting. The drive to Everdale House was a matter of four miles, and as the limousine swept along the short road, Biddeford looked forth, trying to make out the contours of Scarthoe House. He had resolved to excuse himself to Gornal's uncle as

soon after dinner as was compatible with politeness, as he intended that night to make another visit to Scarthoe House.

Everdale House proved to be a Queen Anne residence, set in a fold in the hills, and sheltered securely against the wind from the sea. In the large hall into which Martin was escorted, he found young Gornal, who hurried forward and gripped him cordially by the hand.

"I am delighted you have come, old chap," said the smiling young man, and Martin marveled anew at the perfection of Gornal's apparel. As he held the youth's hand, he took in his surroundings in a swift glance.

The apartment was cosily home-like. A great fire burned in the wide hearth, rugs were scattered over the burnished parquet floor, and comfortable-looking portraits of the Everdale family looked down at them from the wall.

"My uncle thought you would be bored stiff at the inn there," explained Gornal; "and besides, he wants to know you. I have told him about you. Here he comes."

As he spoke, the door of the drawing-room opened at the far end of the hall, and a tall, soldierly, white-haired man advanced.

Colonel Everdale was fifty-five or sixty, with the figure of a man of thirty. His bronzed, rather thin face was wrinkled, his eyes were grey and heavily overshadowed by bushy grey brows. He wore a grey moustache, rather longer than the present military fashion, and as he advanced he held out a cordial hand.

"I am glad to meet you, Captain."

"It is very kind of you to ask me," Biddeford responded.

"No, no, not at all!" exclaimed the Colonel.

He slipped his arm through Biddeford's and led him forward with a cordial simplicity and good nature that was a mere outward expression of his genuine warm-heartedness.

"Come in," he said; "my wife's down. We dine at seven-thirty."

He led Biddeford across the hall and into a handsome drawing room furnished in white and gold with Aubusson tapestry chairs and sofas, gilt-legged furniture, and a carpet in exquisite faded shades of gold and grey. A white polar-bear rug adorned the hearth, and in a gilt-legged chair was seated an elderly woman, also grey-haired. Mrs. Everdale, who was dressed for dinner, and whose neck and ears sparkled with jewels, made a stately figure, Martin thought, as he bowed in greeting.

"I hear, Captain Biddeford," she said, smiling up at him, and speaking with an attractive American intonation, "that you are one of Lord Hyde's young men."

"Only very recently," Biddeford modestly answered.

"Why is it you all have such a passionate admiration for him?" went on Mrs. Everdale, still smiling. "My nephew Sedgely is quite silly about him."

"I think the reason is," Biddeford ventured, "that Lord Hyde is so intensely enthusiastic. I have only known him a few days, but I am like your nephew Sedgely about him. He evokes enthusiasm."

"The chief is a genius," put in Sedgely. "He could have done anything he liked in politics, but he has given it all up for what he thinks is his duty to the Empire."

Colonel Everdale looked at the young man with a smile.

"You have forgotten, Sedgely, the thirty thousand pounds a year he receives from the Panka Oil Company."

"No, uncle, I have not! But what does he do with the thirty thousand a year?" went on Sedgely—"why, he gives it away. He pays Captain Biddeford out of it, he pays me out of it——"

"Yes, of course, of course," interrupted the Colonel, putting up both hands to check his nephew's volubility; "but I must not start you on this topic."

As he spoke, a musical gong sounded in rich vibration from the hall outside. The deft butler performing upon the gong achieved a series of tuneful cadences, beginning with a far-off soft droning, and rising in astonishing crescendo to an impelling volume of sound.

Mrs. Everdale rose.

"Captain Biddeford, will you take me in?" she said.

CHAPTER IX

WHEN dinner was over, Gornal invited Martin up to his room, and portentously closed the door.

"I could hardly wait for dinner to finish," he said. "I have been dying to ask you if you have heard anything of Alvaredo."

"Yes," said Biddeford; "he and some of his friends are in hiding in Scarthoe House, as Lord Hyde foresaw."

"You have seen him?" exclaimed the young man.

"Yes."

"By Gad, you've been quick! I took a turn round Scarthoe House myself when I arrived, and didn't see a sign of life anywhere."

Biddeford detailed the result of his two visits to the empty mansion. When he had finished Gornal whistled.

"But the secret room," he remarked—"how shall we get into it?"

"That secret room," said Martin, "is the one circumstance that has been troubling me all day. I searched for half an hour last night in every place that seemed to be likely, but found no sign of a trap door or any concealed entrance. Of course, I was hampered in the fact that I had to work in the dark."

Gornal stroked his negligible moustache with a forefinger, in a manner which Biddeford had observed to be a habit with him.

"Look here," he said, "when do you think of going there again, Captain?"

"To-night, as soon as I can decently slip away from here."

"But you will never find the room, and the window you saw was too narrow to get in at."

"I must do the best I can," Biddeford returned. "I may have to watch for some days."

Gornal suddenly laid a hand on his shoulder.

"Do you mind, old chap, if I tell the Colonel? As a boy, forty years ago, he and the Scarthoes were the greatest friends. He knows Scarthoe House as he knows the palm of his hand. He is the man to tell us about that secret room."

With Biddeford's permission, he hurried out. Five minutes later he returned with a shining face.

"It's all right, old chap," he said buoyantly. "Your room was a priest's hiding-place. My uncle remembers it perfectly, used to play in it as a boy. There is a sliding trap door in the floor of the attic corridor ten feet west from the big chimney." He paused and hesitated. "I suppose you are going to take me with you?"

"Certainly," said Biddeford.

"And we go now."

"The sooner the better."

The young man expressed his delight, went to his wardrobe, and took out a dark evening coat. He got into this, buttoned it up, and, assuming a dark Homburg hat, announced himself as ready.

"You have got a dark coat that will cover up that white shirt of yours, I suppose, Captain?"

"Yes," Biddeford answered; "I took care of that."

Sedgely Gornal suddenly paused in the buttoning of his coat; a smile played over his features. Presently he

went to a drawer in the dressing-table and drew something from its interior.

"I have got a present for you, old chap—something that you will be surprised to see again."

He advanced towards Biddeford, swinging a dark-looking object by a leather thong.

"This," he said, holding up the object and smiling, "is a life-preserver."

"So I see," said Biddeford.

"Do you recognize it?"

"No."

"The shaft," explained the young man, "is covered with leather and made of steel wire and whalebone. This knob at the end"—he delicately fingered the knob—"is lead covered with leather." He slipped his wrist through the thong and swung the weapon in the air, aiming a blow at an imaginary adversary. Then with a touch of mockery, he presented it to Biddeford.

"It's yours, old chap."

"I don't want it," Biddeford returned; "I have got something else in my hip pocket."

"My hip pocket, too, is full of potential murder. But all the same, you must take this, because it happens to be very specially yours."

Biddeford, in a hurry to depart, was impatient.

"In what way?" he demanded shortly.

"It is the very instrument Alverado used when he rapped you over the head the other night!"

"The deuce it is!" exclaimed Martin, looking at the weapon with a new interest.

"Being possessed of unusual foresight," expatiated Gornal, "I purchased it from the porter who found it

on the stairs of the flat, either thrown there or lost by its owner. Now will you keep it?"

"Yes," said Biddeford; "many thanks."

And slipping his right hand through the thong, he pushed the instrument up his sleeve.

Ten minutes later both men had bidden good night to Mrs. Everdale, and in a large, closed car were speeding down Colonel Everdale's drive. Their driver was not the Colonel's chauffeur, but the Colonel himself, enveloped in a big fur coat and with a cap pulled over his eyes. Gornal and Biddeford, impatient to reach Scarthoe House in the shortest possible time, had gladly accepted his offer of the car and his offer to drive them.

The motor turned into the road, gathered speed, and ascending a hill, was within ten minutes in sight of Scarthoe House. From the window Sedgely Gornal could make out the desolate-looking Tudor mansion across the barren, wind-swept spaces. The night was clear and starlit, and less wind blew than at any time since Martin Biddeford's arrival in the district.

Martin's eyes were on the back of Colonel Everdale as he managed the big car with the skill of long practice, but Gornal's attention was wholly upon Scarthoe House. He was a young man, totally without fear, but he was younger than his companion, and his pulse-beat quickened as he drew nearer towards what he thought might prove a stirring adventure.

The Colonel suddenly turned to the left, and the car traveled along a road running inland, bordered on each side by scattered elm-trees with arms distorted and all leaning one way, bowed and driven out of natural growth by incessant heavy gales.

Five minutes passed, and in a depression in the road the Colonel quietly halted the car and stepped down from his seat.

"I'll wait for you boys here," he said, as the two younger men emerged from the interior of the vehicle, and as he spoke he extinguished his headlights.

"No one can see me here, and I can wait as long as you like." He hesitated for a wistful moment, watching Biddeford and Gornal turning up coat collars and buttoning long, dark overcoats over evening clothes. "I am not quite as active as I used to be, but if you should chance to want me, Gornal, you can show your flashlight at an upper window."

The instinct of the old soldier glowed strongly within him. There was the possibility of a "dust-up," and he longed to be in it. He knew that the document Biddeford intended to get from Alverado was of the utmost importance to Lord Hyde, and, indeed, to the nation. And when the two young men left him a few minutes later, he looked after them with envious eyes.

Five minutes' walking through thick grass and the crossing of half a dozen ditches brought Martin and his companion to the tall outer wall of the mansion. The starlight was strong enough to make objects fairly visible, and Biddeford, leading the way, moved cautiously in the lee of the wall until he found his former scaling-place. With a word to Gornal to follow, he leapt up, crossed the wall, and dropped into the grounds of Scarthoe House. In the tangled growth within the park itself, Gornal, who had followed his companion, halted, staring at the gaunt, desolate-looking mansion, vague, ghostlike, and deadly still in the starlight.

"I can hardly believe that anyone's there at all," he whispered.

But Biddeford was in a hurry. He realized now that he had held himself in leash for the last half a dozen hours.

He wanted to get to grips with Alverado. He desired consumedly to settle his account with that gentleman. Also, he wished to prove that Lord Hyde had chosen well in electing him for this delicate task. He began, indeed, to glimpse a future more to his liking than his late occupation of the sea.

Biddeford remembered his way well, and this time was moving upon a quest with a definite goal. Within five minutes of entering the house, he and Gornal were on the top of the floor.

Groping his way to the window he had opened the night before, Martin raised the blind and lifted the sash. Then, leaning out as far as he could, he looked down upon the ivy-covered wall.

"He is there all right," he said in Gornal's ear. "Look!"

Gornal looked from the window. Twelve feet or so below he saw a faint light quivering on a moving ivy leaf. The light, which would be invisible to anyone in the garden below, caused his spirits to rise with a leap.

"By Gad, Captain! what a wily devil he must be!" he whispered.

Biddeford drew him back and softly closed the window.

"We must find that trap door," he said. "Pace ten paces west from here, Gornal."

Gornal instantly moved forward with measured noiseless footfall. He counted one to ten as he went, and then stopped. Martin reached him, and the two went

on hands and knees and groped about, seeking an interstice which the Colonel had said was discernible in the floor. From this interstice the concealed door could be slid back. Some moments passed. Both were baffled; neither could feel any such crack.

"We shall have to risk a light, after all," Biddeford whispered at length.

Gornal, well aware of the need of caution, produced his torch and switched it on. He dexterously enclosed its illumination with his hands. For a moment neither saw any sign of the hidden door. Then Biddeford whispered an exclamation.

"Here we are!" he said. He had come on a perceptible space between two boards, and a moment later had produced his seaman's knife. He slipped the blade into the narrow space and drew the knife back. Tense, uneventful moments followed, until a slight metallic click rewarded them. Gornal instantly extinguished his torch. Then, to the consternation of both men, with a heavy, rumbling sound, the concealed door slid back. A chasm opened in the floor below them. They were kneeling at its very edge. For a moment they looked down into intense darkness. Then a beam of light became visible shining upon the rungs of a ladder.

Someone was emerging hurriedly from the concealed room below.

Both men sprang back. Biddeford flattened himself against the wall. The footsteps from below drew nearer. In a moment it was apparent that a man was slowly mounting the ladder towards them. A faint radiance issued from the gaping square in the floor boards. A tremulous moment ensued; then a man's head emerged

above the level of the floor. The man continued to ascend—his shoulders appeared, half his body stood revealed. Then Biddeford stepped noiselessly forward, jerked the life-preserver from his sleeve, and poised it. The man's back was towards him, and he had seen nothing, and in another moment he was incapable of seeing anything. For Martin raised the weapon and brought it down with all his strength upon the top of the stranger's head. The man who had emerged from the floor vanished into it again like a flash. He fell to the bottom of the ladder, he uttered not a sound, and he lay like a stricken ox. Gornal stepped to Biddeford's side, and the two looked into the abyss. Martin's fingers gripped Gornal's arm.

"We'll rush the room," he said in a low voice.

And also before Gornal was aware of what had happened, he was running down the ladder in the wake of the stricken man. The door was open which led into Alverado's hiding-place.

"Watch him, Gornal; I'll hold up the room."

Martin thrust himself into the narrow doorway, from which a light was showing, and, with a poised automatic Mauser in his hand, covered the room.

To his surprise and disappointment, Alverado was not there. The stricken figure at the foot of the ladder had been, apparently, the sole occupant of the room. He assured himself that the room was really empty before he and Gornal carried the wounded man into the little apartment.

The two looked down at the still figure on the floor. He was a total stranger—a fat, smooth-shaven, middle-aged man with a yellow, bald head. On the top of his

head was a growing scarlet protuberance where Biddeford's life-preserver had smitten him.

Biddeford looked down at him, a shade of anxiety in his eyes.

"I thought it was Alvarado," he said, "or I would not have hit quite so hard."

"Oh, that doesn't matter," Gornal remarked, with the light indifference of youth; "I expect he deserves all he got."

Biddeford turned his attention to the room—a small, unusually lofty apartment. Dark oak panels covered the walls, and there was the single lofty window Biddeford had discovered from outside. A petroleum stove in one corner provided warmth. On a small table near the wall burned a white-shaded, brass-stemmed oil lamp. A few chairs, a chest of drawers, a narrow wardrobe, evidently specially built to permit of its being lowered into the room, and a bed, summed up the rest of the furniture. Biddeford, with a comprehensive glance at Alverado's comfortable arrangements, turned to his companion.

"I think," he suggested, "you had better keep watch on the floor above. It might be awkward if our gentleman took it into his head to come back just now."

Gornal agreed, and promptly ascended the ladder. Then Martin began his search of the room. He found a cupboard stocked with food, and two or three suits of clothes in the wardrobe, and it was in the wardrobe that he made his first discovery of interest. This was an extremely expensive dark green morocco leather dressing-case, a dandified article with a gilt lock and two gilt clasps. He took it out and examined it by the light of the lamp. It was locked, and on its handle was tied

a luggage label bearing the words "S. Alverado." Biddeford glanced at Alverado's accomplice on the floor. He was lying still with his eyes closed, a mass of unconscious humanity. There was nothing to fear from him. Martin turned his attention to the green dressing-case. The label was proof that it was a possession of Alverado's. Therefore, with much gusto, he began destructive work upon it with his pocket-knife. But his efforts met with no success; the double locks were well made, and easily resisted him. He hesitated, wondering if he should first search the rest of the room, but somehow that gaudy suit-case held his attention. He paused, looking down upon it in perplexity; then an inspiration came to him. Alverado's life-preserver was the very tool he needed. He produced it, and, standing the suit-case upon the floor, smote it a mighty and resounding whack.

"What's that noise?" exclaimed the startled Gornal from above.

"It's all right," called Biddeford; "I am breaking open what seems to be his suit-case."

Half a dozen blows smashed in the front part of the case. And instantly the lid flew open, scattering ties, collars, evening shirts, and a gorgeous suit of pyjamas, upon the floor. Beneath these articles Biddeford found a cash-box a foot in length. He took this in his hands, shook it, and heard a rustling from within. The lock of the cash-box was even better than the fastening of the suit-case, but in five minutes that, too, had surrendered to his assault, and, with the lid twisted and battered, it lay open in his hands.

The interior was filled with neatly arranged papers, and the first paper that met his gaze caused him to sum-

mon his friend with a shout. When Gornal, in the space of five seconds, plunged into the room, Martin was standing with an open document in his hands.

"What is it?" demanded Gornal.

There was triumph in Biddeford's eyes as he held up the typewritten sheet with its appended red seal, the size of an American dollar.

"Unless I'm the son of a sea-cook born blind and deaf," said Biddeford, "this is the concession granted to Norman Grant of New York City."

Gornal took it, looked at it, and suddenly clapped his companion on the shoulder.

"Priceless, priceless old egg!" he exclaimed joyously. "So it is, so it is! By Gad! you'll be in Lord Hyde's good books for this. You don't know what's behind it all. But the possession of this means millions of money to the nation."

A sound came to them. The wounded man in the corner stirred and slowly opened his eyes.

* * * *

At ten o'clock that night the fair-haired barman of the Boar Inn entered the coffee-room conveying a hot drink for Mr. Park. The detective was the sole occupant of the room, and was seated as near the fire as was possible without singeing his garments. A cigar occupied the corner of his mouth. There was a little table at his side, and upon this the barman laid the hot drink, with its slice of lemon and two lumps of sugar.

"Has Captain Biddeford come in yet?" asked Park.

"No, sir."

The American lifted his drink, tingled a spoon in his glass, and drank.

"I never felt the cold like I feel it here in my life," he remarked.

"No, sir?" questioned the barman.

"No; it's the damp, I suppose—it goes through you!" He applied himself to his glass again.

"I guess I'll have another of these before I go to bed." He put out his hand and laid it on the barman's sleeve.

"Now, look here, if I try to sit in that big bedroom of mine, I freeze solid. That being so, is there any rule against me doing a bit of typing before the fire, here?"

"Certainly not, sir," responded the barman.

"Thank you, boy. Now, if you will run up and get my little machine——"

The barman departed, and presently returned carrying Mr. Park's portable typewriter.

"Thank you. Sure I'm in nobody's way here?"

"Not at all, sir. You and Captain Biddeford are the only two guests we have staying here at present."

"Thank you, boy. When Captain Biddeford comes in, bring me another of these, very hot."

"Drink is not allowed after ten o'clock," said the barman, and looked very hard into Park's eyes.

"Make it a Pussyfoot," said Mr. Park, and in his turn looked very hard into the barman's eyes.

"Very good, sir."

The barman went out, closed the door, and smiled quietly to himself.

Mr. Park set his small typewriter on a chair before him, removed its lid, inserted a sheet of paper, and swung back his head. For several moments he stared hard

at the ceiling, and as he stared he smoked, expelling upwards a white and voluminous cloud. There was an expression of deep cogitation on his humorous face. Suddenly he began to type, clattering along with one finger of each hand at astonishing speed.

"Well, I'm still here," he wrote, "where the briny breezes blow. And things are moving. Yes! I guess there's no doubt about that! I told you in my last that Martin Biddeford, the Captain of the *Lachine*, was here, and that I was puzzled about him. I am still puzzled. I have had a quiet look through his belongings, and they tell me nothing.

"Now, in regard to the concession, I am not losing hope, and if I don't freeze to death in this hotel before next week, I will be sending you some fine news. It goes like this. I have tracked our Miss Morris here. She's deep, but she's not as deep as a well, and I guess I'll get her or the concession by to-morrow or the day after.

"Sebastian Alverado is in this vicinity. So if Biddeford's mixing in on behalf of his bunch, it's a three-cornered fight. But I'm here to win, sure Mike! I'm serious, and I mean to get that concession for our client or I won't come back alive!"

This characteristic epistle, which occupied a sheet of Detective Park's paper, was withdrawn from the machine, and with a smile of satisfaction Park read it through, correcting it here and there, and folded it.

He was about to cover up his machine again, when footsteps caught his ear from outside. He glanced quickly at the clock. It was fifteen minutes to twelve.

In a moment the door opened, and Biddeford, in a long, dark overcoat, stepped into the room.

"Ah!" exclaimed Park, looking Biddeford over, as the young man slipped out of his outer coat, revealing his evening clothes, "so you've come back safely, after all?"

"Eh?" questioned Biddeford sharply.

"You emerged, I mean, from the festive board later than you expected!"

"Oh," laughed Martin, "it's nearly twelve. I could not stay all night!"

"And in the best of spirits, too," said Park, eyeing him closely, and smiling widely and humorously to hide his scrutiny.

"And in the best of spirits," cheerfully responded Biddeford.

He deposited himself in a chair at the other side of the hearth and rang the bell. Half an hour earlier, he and young Gornal had slipped safely out of Scarthoe House carrying the concession. There had been no sign of Alverado, and the wounded man, unable to interfere, had watched them go with dazed eyes.

Biddeford felt, as he looked quizzically into the American's humorous eyes, that he had a good deal to make him thankful for.

"Mine will be here in a minute," Park said; "we will quaff together."

Then, to the accompaniment of refreshment and tobacco Mr. Park set himself to pump the younger man. But to all his questions Martin made cheerful and completely evasive answers. Something had occurred to put the young man into that joyous state of mind—but what? Detective Park was nonplussed; and when he rose, tucked

his typewriter case under his arm, and sought his room, he turned at the door.

"Martin, my boy," he exclaimed, "you are a bright lad; you have changed. When I met you that morning in Liverpool for the first time, you were not as bright as you are now."

There was genuine commendation in his remark.

"Thanks," Biddeford responded; "perhaps it's the bright company I keep."

Park, who was outside, put his head back through the door.

"What about a game of halma?" he enquired; for on the previous evening he and Martin had played a tough game of this harmless pastime.

"Not to-night."

"No," responded Park, grinning at him: "I guess you are beginning to learn there are bigger games than halma in the world—eh, Martin?"

But to this Martin made no answer.

CHAPTER X

NEXT morning Biddeford woke up on a cloudless day and a sky of delicate blue. There had been frost in the night, and the air was fresh and exhilarating.

As he dressed he whistled a tune, and even sang a few bars of a sea chantey. 'This performance, however, seemed to annoy Mr. Park, who knocked upon the intervening wall and called through:

"Martin, boy, whistle, but don't sing."

Martin laughed and continued to whistle. When he had finished dressing, he descended, and, consuming a large breakfast, emerged into the brightness of the morning. Then he set out to walk to Colonel Everdale's abode.

The success of last night's visit to Scarthoe House still animated him joyously. He had never felt happier than he felt that morning. To have so easily and quickly achieved a feat which Lord Hyde regarded as dangerous, filled him with gratification.

When he had accomplished the walk to Colonel Everdale's, and had cast a side-glance at the gloom of Scarthoe House as he passed, he found the Colonel and Sedgely Gornal in the library, awaiting him. Both men greeted him enthusiastically.

It had been decided among them to take infinite precautions in the transfer of the concession into Lord Hyde's hands. The three men, guessing at Sebastian Alverado's resources and ability, were prepared to take no risks. The

night before Martin and young Gornal had emerged without incident from Scarthoe House, save that the injured man had watched them with lowering gaze. In fact, the very best of luck had attended them, until the precious concession was safely locked in Colonel Everdale's safe.

Biddeford, having his doubts of Park, had not risked taking it to the inn with him, and it was from the Colonel's safe—a receptacle neatly concealed in the wall—whence it was now produced.

"You were wise, Biddeford, not to have this at the Boar with you," said Colonel Everdale. "I am sure the man Park is here either to spy on you or on Alverado."

He handed the typewritten document with its scarlet seal to Martin, who looked at it again in the light of day with vivid interest. Together with the concession itself were several sheets of paper written in Spanish, with the recurring name of a vessel, the *April Day*, on each page. Biddeford had brought these on an impulse of the moment, and for the rest of his life he was destined to bless the luck which made him submit to that impulse. The *April Day* was that morning a name to him, and no more, but afterwards it was to become the center of an adventure which transcended all other adventures of his life.

After contemplating the documents for some moments, Biddeford folded them, placed them in a large envelope, and handed them formally to the Colonel.

It had been arranged that Biddeford should remain until the evening at Everdale House, making his presence there as obvious as possible. Gornal, too, was to remain there, also in view for Alverado or any of his watchers. The concession itself was then to be given into the keeping of Colonel Everdale's butler, a trusted servant, who was

to slip out of the house by the back way and cycle by a round-about route to Hartlepool.

When this plan was completed, Bradfield, the butler, was brought into the room and instructed to deliver the document into Lord Hyde's hands personally. He was to join the London express at West Hartlepool, but was to carefully avoid making his appearance on the main road to Hartlepool. Bradfield left the house at eleven-twenty by the back way, and ten minutes after his departure a motor cycle spun out from amongst some trees adjoining Colonel Everdale's residence. The rider of the cycle headed along the main road for Hartlepool. The machine sped along the dry, hard road at a fine leaping pace. The keen morning air whipped the rider's cheeks, vivifying the brilliant color that Biddeford had admired aboard the *Lachine*, for the rider was Miss Morris. A curve of her fine dark hair was visible beneath a tight khaki cap. She wore a short skirt, puttees, and an enveloping coat. Descending the long shore road, she passed Scarthoe House on the right, and cast a glance at the mansion in the morning sunlight. Driving her machine with exceptional skill, she let out the pace on a long, clear stretch of road. On one side of the road ran a long, low, North Country wall bordering fields of short grass. As far as she could see no one was in sight. Save herself, the world that morning seemed empty of human beings. Presently she slackened her pace a little, descending a hill approaching the sole twist in the road. A flock of seabirds flying inland passed overhead, calling and crying, and an instant later Miss Morris uttered an exclamation of annoyance. At a turn she saw a large Rolls-Royce car drawn across the road at an angle which precluded any possibility of

advance. The road was effectively blocked. The chauffeur of the obstructing car was bending down at the carburetor.

The girl called to him, but the fellow apparently did not hear, and she was obliged to dismount a few yards from the big car.

"Do you mind drawing aside a little? I am in a hurry."

The man lifted his head and looked at her. And at the same moment someone from the interior of the big car stepped out, and, with hands in the pockets of a long overcoat, stood smiling into Miss Morris's face.

The swift color mounted to the girl's cheeks and faded again.

"This is a splendid morning for a drive—eh, Miss Morris?"

"Splendid," answered the girl; "but I am in a hurry, and——"

Sebastian Alverado looked down into her face.

"I shall detain you only long enough to ask you a few brief questions," he remarked.

"They will have to be brief," retorted Miss Morris.

"The length of the conversation will depend entirely upon you. Now, Miss Morris," continued Alverado, "I want, without further delay, the documents your friends had the temerity to take from my suit-case last night."

"What documents?"

"The concession granted by my misguided Government to the Norman Grant Oil Company, and certain sheets of paper in Spanish concerning matters that are my private concern."

"I am sorry," said the girl, "but I know nothing whatever of any such documents."

Alverado's mouth hardened.

"I am in a hurry," he said curtly.

"So am I," responded the girl in a flash. She had grown suddenly pale, but her eyes were undaunted, and, with a quick movement of her hand from her coat pocket, she levelled a Mauser pistol in Alverado's direction.

The big man laughed, his hard, yellow face wreathed in a smile.

"Courageous as ever!"

"If you don't let me pass I shall shoot!"

"No, no," said Alverado; "that would be foolish. It is only necessary to give me what I want, and you shall be free as air. And in regard to shooting, perhaps if you will do me one little courtesy——"

The girl, fearing a trap of some sort, had moved back out of reach of his long arms.

"What is that?" she asked.

"Merely," said Alverado easily, "that you should look beyond me into the polished surface of my car. You will then see that a resort to violence would not help you in the least."

For a moment Miss Morris stared at him uncomprehendingly; then her eyes moved from his figure to the bright surface of his car and back again. But she had seen enough. For reflected in the panels of the car were two men, who had risen from concealment from behind the stone wall bordering the road at her back. The game was up. One armed woman against four armed men, as she guessed them to be—the odds were too many against her.

"Now," he added, entirely at his ease, "will you give me your papers?"

But Miss Morris protested that she had no papers of any kind.

"Your pockets are large," said Alverado meaningly, "and I am afraid I don't trust you."

The girl unbuttoned her coat, drew it off, and handed it to him.

"Those are all the pockets I have," she said; "you can search them."

Alverado dived into one pocket after the other, looking at her out of the corner of his eyes. Then he took Miss Morris's gauntlets, which she had laid on the saddle of her machine, and examined them closely.

"Do you swear you have nothing of mine?"

"Certainly."

She stood before him, a slender, poised figure in a khaki jersey and a plain, rather scanty skirt. Her attractive little hat, drawn well over her ears, was the only decorative article about her.

"Take off your hat," commanded Alverado.

She hesitated a moment, then drew it off. He took it, looked at the lining, crushed it in his hand, and presented it to her again. Then he advanced a pace and passed his hand swiftly over her jersey.

"Pockets in your skirt?" he questioned.

"No."

She stood back with flaming cheeks.

"I tell you I have nothing," she said, and stamped her foot.

"Nevertheless, I will make sure." He gripped her by the arm, and passed his hand over her person from head to foot. Then for a moment longer he still held her in his strong fingers. He remained looking keenly down

at her, calculation and suspicion in his eyes. Then his expression gradually relaxed.

"You can go," he said. He signalled to his chauffeur, and mounted the step of his car. His two companions entered the limousine with him. The big vehicle swung round and sped back towards Everdale House.

For some minutes Miss Morris watched the receding car; then she buttoned up her coat, drew on her hat, and rode away towards Hartlepool. In the meantime Alverado was looking anxiously out of the car along the road ahead. Suddenly a new thought struck him. "Drive to Scarthoe Telegraph Office," he commanded through the tube.

Fifteen minutes later, in the little telegraph office at Scarthoe, he despatched a wire to London which, translated, read as follows:

"Article we require will be delivered Hyde some time to-night. Arriving express from Hartlepool. Expect you to intercept it. Details left with you."

CHAPTER XI

FOR the greater part of that morning, the Colonel, Gornal, and Martin aired themselves in the Colonel's grounds. Once a large Rolls Royce car whizzed past, and the three caught a glimpse of a figure inside, but if the car's occupant was Alverado he made no attempt to descend. By one o'clock, when Martin felt that he knew the geography of Everdale's garden like the back of his own hand, Gornal threw away a cigarette and voiced the feeling of the others.

"Captain," he said, "it seems to me that we have aired ourselves enough for one day. If our friend is busy with our doings, he must have decided either not to rush us at present or to leave us alone until some more favorable time. You don't think by any chance he picked up Bradfield's trail?"

"The London express must be well past York by now," said Martin; "and as the Colonel's butler is unknown to Alverado, the chance of anything happening to him on the journey is more than unlikely." He turned and glanced at Colonel Everdale. "I hope that Bradfield is not a garrulous man, Colonel?"

The Colonel shook his head.

"Bradfield would be mute as a fish when on a mission of this kind. He has been with me for over twenty years, and I have never known him guilty of an indiscretion."

Martin, who had been feeling a little uneasy at the

absence of any manifestation of activity on the part of Alverado, took out his watch.

"Colonel," he said, "I wonder if you would let your chauffeur fetch my suit-case from the inn? I have a fancy to run into West Hartlepool this afternoon and investigate the situation from there. I have been thinking about the *April Day*, which seems to occupy so much space in Alverado's correspondence. I think Lord Hyde would like to know all there is to know about that vessel. If Alverado is planning to slip out of the country, we ought to be ready to stop him, if necessary."

"He is hardly likely to go to the expense of chartering a vessel merely to provide a passage for himself," remarked the Colonel.

"He's got pots of money, and I would not be surprised at anything he did," put in Gornal.

"If he has chartered the *April Day*," said Biddeford, "we may take it that he won't be the only passenger, and that Lord Hyde would like to know what cargo he ships."

As a result of this conversation, Colonel Everdale's chauffeur returned from the Boar Inn later that afternoon and delivered Martin's suit-case into Gornal's room.

"Did anyone speak to you at the inn?" Martin asked the chauffeur on his return.

"Yes, sir, an American gentleman. He asked if you were leaving."

"What did you tell him?"

"As you directed, sir. I told him that you were staying with Colonel Everdale at present."

"Thank you," said Martin. "I am much obliged."

The chauffeur turned at the door.

"There was another man with a bicycle hanging about

the door of the house, sir. He followed me when I came away. I kept nicely ahead of him," said the chauffeur, feeling that he was participant in important affairs. "He's outside the lodge gates now, sir."

Biddeford smiled his approbation. "You are a talented young man. Do you think this industrious cyclist could keep up with you if we ran into Hartlepool when I have changed my clothes?"

The chauffeur smiled knowingly.

"He either could or he couldn't, sir, just as you wish."

"Well," said Martin, "Mr. Gornal and I shall be leaving for West Hartlepool in a few minutes, and we want to shake this man off."

"Very good, sir," said the man, and went out of the room.

Gornal, who had been stretching himself in a low arm-chair, sat up.

"What are you going to do, Captain?"

"I am going to change into a suit of clothes that won't make me conspicuous on the Hartlepool Docks. Then I'm going to take you to Hartlepool with me."

"To find out about the *April Day*?"

Biddeford nodded, and unlocked his suit-case. Ten minutes later he had changed his clothes and was surveying himself in Gornal's mirror.

"Well, what do you think of me?" he demanded.

Gornal rose and eyed him over.

"With that cap and that muffler on, I would not have known you," the young man admitted.

For Biddeford was wearing a short pea-jacket the worse for wear, old blue trousers, and a flat sailor's cap. His jacket was buttoned tightly up, and instead of a collar

he wore a dark handkerchief about his throat. Not only his exterior, but his manner had changed, and Gornal laughed as he strode the room.

"Perfect, Captain!" exclaimed the young man.

Biddeford drew a long overcoat over his unusual rig.

"What about me? Can't I disguise myself?"

Biddeford looked him over.

"It will be enough disguise for you if you leave your lemon-colored gloves behind. But if that doesn't satisfy you, you can stick a feather in your hat and try to look like a hen!"

He hurried out, and Gornal, without gloves, followed him.

An hour later, when the car drew to a halt at West Hartlepool Station, Biddeford and his companion alighted.

"What happened to the cyclist?" Martin asked the chauffeur.

"Three miles was enough for him, sir. He won't be here for an hour yet."

Martin threw off his overcoat, and he and Gornal set off for the docks together. Here the two men separated according to plan, and Martin, walking to the water-side, took out his pipe and lit it. Meanwhile Gornal made his way to the office of the harbor master, and sent in his card. During Gornal's absence, Martin smoked and watched the shipping.

"Well," Biddeford asked, "any news?" when at last the youth returned and came hurrying towards him.

"Yes," said Gornal, "the *April Day* is here, and is lying in Easington Dock."

"What sort of boat is she?"

"An oil tanker, two thousand tons. An old boat, formerly belonged to Probyn and Schneider."

"Who does she belong to now?" asked Martin quickly.

"A small syndicate bought her last week. A man named Ventnor seems to hold most of the shares."

"No sign of Alverado among the shareholders?" questioned Biddeford.

Gornal shook his head.

"When is she sailing?"

"The harbor master could not tell me at present. She is waiting for cargo."

"All right," said Biddeford; "I'll slip along and have a look at her."

"Can't I come?" Gornal asked.

"No; you would spoil the picture," Martin said, waving his hand and strolling away.

Ten minutes later Biddeford was at the Easington Dock, looking at an ugly, grey-painted craft with a gangway running aboard. Half a dozen dark-skinned sailors lounged about her decks, and at the head of the gangway a black-eyed, black-bearded ship's officer was talking to a man who had just come aboard with a suit-case. Martin, with an idea that he might hear something of their conversation, lounged up the gangway. He got near enough to hear a few words in Spanish which meant nothing to him, when the ship's officer threw up a violent hand.

"Get off there!" he shouted.

"Don't you want to sign on any hands?" questioned Martin, halting.

"No. Get off!"

"They told me your crew was not made up," said Biddeford. "I'm looking for a ship."

"I tell you, get off," said the black-bearded man, coming down the gangway as if to throw him off; "we want no English hands."

"All dagos, eh?" questioned Biddeford, holding his ground. "Are you the captain?"

"I am not," said the black-bearded man furiously, "and if you don't get off I'll have you chucked off." He turned and beckoned to a group of men smoking on a hatch.

"All right," tantalized Biddeford, "I don't think I'll join you, after all. I couldn't stand the aroma."

He turned and strolled slowly away.

An hour later, when Gornal saw Martin again, he was accompanied by a short, bearded man of fifty or so, the broadest man Gornal had ever seen. A remarkable feature about him was that he appeared to have no neck at all.

"This," said Biddeford, laying a hand on the squat man's shoulder, "is Sam Ducat, an old friend of mine."

"Charmed to meet you," said Gornal cordially, and put out a hand which was engulfed in the short man's palm.

"Thankee," said Ducat; and having by this exhausted his good manners, he walked to the dock-side and spat into it.

"Sam," explained Biddeford, "was in the first ship I sailed in. He did me a good turn then, which I shall naturally never forget."

Sam, who had returned from the dock-side, looked at Gornal. "It was nothing to make a fuss about," he said, waving his hand to dismiss an embarrassing subject; "the Captain always 'arps on it."

Ducat and Martin had met by accident a few minutes before, when Biddeford was on his way back to Gornal.

Martin now turned to the short sailor.

"Sam," he said, "how are things with you?"

"Looking for a ship, Captain, but not North Atlantic work; that does not suit my rheumatism."

"You can afford to wait till you get a good offer?"

Sam Ducat smiled. There had never been a time during a period of thirty years when he had wanted a berth and failed to find one, and he had always been a thrifty man. He was ready at the present moment to go to sea again in a vessel that suited him, and not otherwise.

Biddeford looked down at him, at the great breadth of shoulder, the wrinkled face, the good grey eyes, deep set under shadowing brows. Sam was a man after his own heart, and the meeting had filled him with pleasure. An idea came to him suddenly.

"Sam," he said, "I want to get a confidential man aboard a boat called the *April Day*. Do you know her?"

"There is an old tanker in the Easington Dock by that name," said Sam.

"That's the boat. She's not up to your standard?"

"She ain't," said Sam tersely.

"Listen to me, Sam," Martin said, and told him of his visit to the *April Day*.

"They would never ship me, but for reasons I can't tell you now, I want a man to make this voyage in her. It will be worth your while——"

"I don't mind about that, Captain; the question is, does it help you?"

"Yes," said Biddeford.

That settled the matter for Sam Ducat.

"If they ship any British hands at all, it will be all right," he said.

"I'll come to your lodgings to-morrow and hear how things are going," remarked Martin, gripping his hand.

"Thank ye, Captain," answered Ducat, and looked at Gornal. "Good-day to you, sir," he said.

A moment later he was strolling away along the dock.

"What a queer-looking individual!" remarked Gornal. "He looks like a great big flat fish."

Martin turned sharply on him.

"He looks what he is, one of the whitest men alive, and the best friend I ever had. When I was a boy of eighteen he saved my life, and we have been friends ever since."

* * * *

That night, when Biddeford returned to the Boar Inn at Scarthoe, he avoided the parlor and went straight up to bed. He had had a busy and successful day, for by now Bradfield, Colonel Everdale's butler, would have delivered the concession safely into Lord Hyde's hands. And at this end, Sam Ducat, as shrewd a sailor as ever sailed the sea, was watching Alverado and the *April Day*. Having these things to comfort him, Martin slept well that night, and descended to breakfast next morning with a fine appetite.

When he entered the inn parlor, he found Detective Park seated as usual by the fire—almost, in fact, on top of the fire. The detective looked up sharply and smiled his broad, sarcastic smile.

"Wicked little Captain!" he said, ignoring the fact that Martin was twice his size. "Where is she?"

"What she?" demanded Biddeford.

"Little khaki angel on a motorcycle," said Park derisively—"honk, honk!"

Martin rang the bell for breakfast, and sat down at table.

"If it's a conundrum," he said, "I give it up."

"Conundrum, nothing. I'm talking about Miss Morris. You saw her yesterday, I guess."

"Saw Miss Morris!"

Martin stared at him incredulous and amazed, and his expression was so genuine that Detective Park was puzzled.

"Yes; she's hereabouts, and as beautiful as ever. I tell you that girl's a peach, Captain. I——"

At that moment the door opened. But instead of the waiter, Colonel Everdale's chauffeur entered hurriedly and handed Biddeford a note. Martin tore it open, and his lips tightened.

"Come along at once in the car," wrote the Colonel. "Something has happened to poor Bradfield."

Biddeford slowly severed the note into fragments, and under the sharp eye of Detective Park dropped it on the fire. For a full minute he was silent; then he glanced at the Colonel's chauffeur waiting near the door.

"I'll come at once," he said.

The man turned and went out to his car.

"What's this about seeing Miss Morris?" Martin asked of Park when the door had closed.

"I saw her yesterday doing forty miles an hour in the direction of Hartlepool," returned Park frankly; "and as you had business in Hartlepool yesterday, I put two and two together and thought you were the lucky man."

"Are you sure it was Miss Morris?" Martin asked, still feeling that there must be a mistake somewhere.

Park looked long and steadily into Martin's face.

"Cap," he said at length, "I can tell by your face and by the way you tore up that note that something has gone wrong with your plans. Well, I'll confess to you that at this moment I am in the same boat. I followed Miss Morris here from London a few days ago, and, having business with her, I tried to get a *tête-à-tête*, but she was too quick for me. That woman's got nerve, Martin. She's doing big things, and the people who are paying her are getting their money's worth."

Through the window Martin could see the outline of Colonel Everdale's car. It was essential that he should go, and yet the astounding news that Miss Morris had been in Scarthoe held him for a moment longer.

"What exactly do you want Miss Morris for?" he demanded, looking keenly into Park's face.

"I guess that's no business of yours, Captain, but I'll tell you if you tell me what you want her for."

"I don't want her," said Biddeford, and hurried out of the room. Thoughts were spinning through his head. The Colonel's message was full of portent, and however much he wanted to pump Park about Miss Morris, he felt that his first duty was to learn what had occurred to Bradfield.

* * * *

When the car drew to a halt at length at the Colonel's door, Martin leapt out, and found the elderly soldier on the doorstep awaiting him. In a moment, by the expression on the Colonel's face, he knew what had happened.

"We have lost the concession?" he said.

Everdale nodded.

"Come to my study; the wire came an hour ago. Poor Bradfield was attacked and badly injured; he evidently hadn't a chance."

Two minutes later Martin was in the Colonel's study, where he found Gornal seated in a dejected attitude by the fire. He sprang up as Martin and the Colonel entered, and handed Martin a telegram.

The wire was from London, despatched early that morning by the medical officer of Charing Cross Hospital, and ran:

"Albert Bradfield, street casualty case detained, fractured ribs and scalp wound, asks me to send you following message: 'Was attacked outside Lord Hyde's house by four men; all papers taken; deep regrets.—BRADFIELD.'"

"Well?" questioned the Colonel.

"We ought to have sent a younger man," Martin answered. "But it is no good thinking of that now. Alverado has got it again by this time, and unless we are as quick on our feet as he is, he will be out of the country before we can say 'knife.'"

Then, with the telegram in his fingers, Martin walked to the window and looked out into the Colonel's grounds. The Colonel and Gornal remained silently at the hearth. Tacitly both men seemed to leave the solution of the matter in Biddeford's hands.

Suddenly Martin turned and laid Bradfield's wire on the Colonel's desk.

"Colonel," he said, "this is a set-back, but it does not

finish us. We know where Alverado is, and where he is the concession is, or will be in a few days. Perhaps you would not mind wiring to Lord Hyde that when Alverado sails I intend to sail with him."

"You mean you will follow him if he tries to get away in the *April Day*?" asked Gornal.

Martin nodded.

"How will you get aboard?"

"That will have to be arranged."

He turned to the Colonel, and asked for the loan of the car to drive into Hartlepool. Then, still forgetting his breakfast, he hurriedly left the house and drove away.

Everdale stood at the window of his study and watched the car glide away down the drive.

"What a pity, Sedgely," he said, "we can't take him wholly into our confidence."

"You mean——?" said the young man.

"About Edna. I think she is too daring," said the Colonel.

Gornal, who had been studying a railway guide, looked up.

"I see," he said, "I can catch the same train as poor Bradfield caught yesterday, so I had better go and pack my bag. Then, instead of you wiring to Lord Hyde, I can give him a personal report. I shall have a pretty unpleasant quarter of an hour," he said ruefully. "There is one thing he can't stand, and that's failure."

"This isn't failure," returned the Colonel. "I'm a believer in Biddeford."

CHAPTER XII

ALMOST at the very hour when the Colonel received poor Bradfield's wire, Sebastian Alverado also received a telegram from London. The message which came to him was long, but it was of a different tenor from that received by his adversaries.

Alverado's wire was addressed to "Mr. Ventnor, care of Pillin's Hotel, West Hartlepool." The waiter brought it to "Mr. Ventnor" in that gentleman's private sitting-room.

"A telegram, sir," said the man.

"Ah!" exclaimed "Mr. Ventnor," and took it swiftly in his fingers.

The moment the waiter closed the door behind him, "Mr. Ventnor," an excessively tall man, handsome, dark-skinned, and fashionably dressed, tore open the wire. There was a second occupant of the room, a stout, middle-aged man in black, with a sallow, bald head, a rich gold watch-chain, and a star-shaped decoration of pink sticking-plaster on the top of his hairless scalp. This personage was somewhat languid in manner. He had recently received a knock on the head which had made him languid. The appearance of the telegram, however, seemed to awaken a spark of vitality in him.

"Is it from Reis?" he asked.

"Yes," answered Sebastian Alverado. For he was only "Mr. Ventnor" during such time as he might deign to stay in Pillin's Hotel.

"Yes, it's from Reis," he smiled. Then he read the telegram, folded it, and placed it in his pocketbook.

"I think," he remarked confidentially, "that is the last we shall hear of Lord Hyde and his young men."

The man at the window said quietly:

"So you have got the concession again, Sebastian?"

"It will be with us this evening, and in two days it will be on the high seas."

"I wish," said the fat man, rubbing his hands, "I could have one of Lord Hyde's young men out in Mexico for a few hours." His voice had deepened as he spoke; it was now a growl. Alverado flashed a glance at him.

"You mean the one who knocked you over the head?"

"If," said José de Mattos slowly, in the same growling tone—"if I ever have the young man Biddeford in Mexico——"

"He will probably give you another knock over the head," interrupted Alverado brutally. "There are more important things to be considered than your sore head at the present moment, José. The sooner we get out of England now, the better. Lord Hyde has power, the man Biddeford isn't a fool—and there are others."

The bald man rose, and, following Alverado's example, assumed his hat, which was on the table near him.

They passed out of the hotel together, and walked in the direction of the docks. It was already dark, but Alverado seemed to know the town well, and presently he halted and knocked at the door of a house in a shabby street of old dwellings.

A man with a grey beard, who looked like a sailor, opened the door, then stood aside to let the two pass within.

Alverado's great height made it necessary for him to duck his head as he entered.

"Are they upstairs?" he said to the man as they went into the hall in the semi-darkness.

"Aye, they are all there."

Alverado, followed by his companion, ascended a bare staircase with a rickety banister. At the top he turned and pushed open a door of a first-floor room overlooking the street. The cloud of tobacco which met him was so dense that he could see faces only through a mist.

There was a dozen dark-skinned seafaring men in the room, as villainous-looking a company as it was possible to gather together.

Sebastian Alverado stood looking them over.

"Well, boys, have you got anything to drink?"

"No," said two or three together; "he says there is no more to drink."

"Oh yes, there is," Alverado remarked; "tell him I said so." He touched the man nearest him on the shoulder and pointed to the door, and the fellow immediately went out.

Then a man with a jet-black beard, who had been seated at the head of the table, in answer to a signal from Alverado's eyes, rose, and moved to his side.

"We said Thursday noon, Captain," said Alverado, looking up at him. "Keep them out of the public-houses till then, and there must be no talking."

Captain Jacobo nodded and spoke in a low voice:

"How's the news, señor?"

"Good," said Alverado; "we shall be met ten miles to the south of the Long Scar Rocks. Do you know them?"

The man nodded.

"That's near the mouth of the Tees, señor. It will be dark by then. You were right about the crew, señor. The Port Authorities have begun to get suspicious about us, but I have taken on three English hands, as you said. This will keep suspicion quiet in the meantime."

"It will be as well to arrange that these three hands have plenty to drink before they come aboard, Jacobo."

Captain Jacobo grinned.

"There's no fear of that," he said; "I have never known an out-bound sailor who didn't."

Alverado looked at him coldly.

"I am giving an order," he remarked harshly.

"I understand, señor," said the captain, instantly banishing his mirth.

Five minutes later Alverado and the fat man de Mattos were out of the house.

* * * *

At twelve o'clock on Thursday morning "Mr. Ventnor" paid his bill at Pillin's Hotel in West Hartlepool and had his luggage placed in a taxi.

"Station," he said in a loud voice, for the benefit of the hotel porter, as he stepped inside the vehicle, accompanied by de Mattos. At West Hartlepool Station he placed his luggage in the left luggage office, lingered a few minutes in the booking-hall, and, presently emerging again, entered another taxi, this time ordering the man to drive to Easington Dock.

Here he and de Mattos alighted, paid the man, and turned towards the crowded harbor. Presently they came in sight of the *April Day*. A little wisp of smoke trailed

at the steamer's funnel, and a gangway ran from the shore to her deck. On the deck itself, at the head of the gangway, Captain Jacobo awaited them.

"Well?" demanded Alverado the moment his foot touched the deck.

"The crew's all aboard, señor," said Jacobo with satisfaction.

Alverado handed the ticket for his luggage to the captain.

"Send one of our men to the railway-station for this luggage," he said. "Is the saloon ready?"

"Everything is ready, señor."

"Can we get off by five?" Alverado asked.

Jacobo informed him that the vessel would certainly be under way at that hour. Then Alverado proceeded to watch the final preparations for departure. To one or two Mexican sailors who hurried past him, engaged on various duties, he flung words of Spanish, which were answered volubly. He moved aft at length, and here he saw a wide-shouldered fellow lying on the edge of a skylight. The recumbent personage was a short-legged man with large seaman's boots and a reefer jacket. He was fast asleep, with his mouth open, breathing heavily. Alverado moved forward and looked down at him keenly. He saw the lined face of a seaman of fifty with grizzled hair and a tough, greying beard, like a thicket. For some moments he regarded the abandoned figure in silence. Then in silence he beckoned forward his captain.

"Who's this?" he asked.

"One of the three English hands, señor. He's drunk."

"I see he is," said Alverado. "What's his name?"

"Sam Ducat; he's an able seaman."

"Does he know Spanish?"

"Not a word, señor."

"He looks a strong and capable fellow. Work him hard; that will prevent him having time to pry into our affairs."

The two regarded Sam's prone figure for some moments, then turned and walked aft. As they turned, the recumbent man, still breathing heavily, turned his head as if in uneasy sleep and opened his eyes; then swiftly shut them again. He was not nearly so drunk as some people might think.

* * * *

That afternoon Alverado's vessel made her unobtrusive departure from the Easington Dock, and Detective James Park, of the Pinkerton Company, watched her go. He occupied a strategic position behind a neat pile of timber, and was in his overcoat as usual, his slaty eyes intent upon nothing but the grey bulk of the *April Day*.

He watched the vessel until she was well out of the harbor, and was headed southeast past Seaton Carew. Then, pausing to light a cigar, he strolled back to Hartlepool and caught a train to Scarthoe.

Here, in the coffee-room, Park opened his neat typewriter case, and began to indite a letter to his New York office. The letter possessed all his characteristics of brevity and pungency.

"Alverado has quit; is making for Mexico aboard a vessel he has chartered," wrote the detective. "He is making a get-away to draw off the English authorities. All the same, I've put a man aboard who can watch him—no less a man, in fact, than McGuire, the discharged wireless

operator of the *Lachine*. McGuire has engaged to keep us up to date with Alverado's doings, and will send you news from the other side. Here is a conundrum for you. Alverado has no wireless in the *April Day*, yet he engages a wireless operator. Why? Another conundrum. The *April Day* is an old oil tanker; you can smell her a mile off, and among the cargo are a few thousand army blankets. Why?

"Miss Morris is still here, and if I can lay my hands on her before the New York police get her for the Norman Grant affair, I'll sure get what we want—the little old concession. We know she took it out of the safe the night Norman Grant was murdered, and she's got it now. The man Biddeford puzzles me; he has vanished. I thought he was stuck on Miss Morris, but Miss Morris is here and he is gone. I can't place him in this game."

Eight days later, when Park's letter reached the New York office of the Pinkerton Company, it caused something of a flutter, for the political department of the great detective agency saw a good deal more in the new adventure of Sebastian Alverado than was apparent to Detective Park.

CHAPTER XIII

THE *April Day* was making her eight or nine knots' progress toward the Mexican coast. There had been a pause and mysterious packages had come aboard near the mouth of the Tees, but since then the voyage for days had been without event. At the end of the second week Alverado appeared in a tussore suit, and awnings were spread over a section of the deck. It was likewise in the second week that McGuire's attitude became limp. He was a man of dissipated habits, and the heat did not suit him. Then there was the fact that very little notice was taken of him by Alverado and his officers, and that with no work to do time hung heavy on his hands. All the same, things were going well with him. He had picked up a neat retaining fee from Detective Park, and concurrently, as the magistrates say, he was drawing a handsome salary from Alverado for eating good food and staring at the scenery! No; there was nothing particular about the situation as McGuire found it.

Four weeks after her departure from Hartlepool, when the vessel was in the Mexican Gulf, Alverado and his crowd, in a state of nervous expectancy, were drinking healths to the success of to-morrow, for they expected to make land by morning. McGuire slipped out of the saloon and went on deck. It was dark, and the stars, veiled in a tropical haze, glimmered nebulously. The air was close and humid, and beneath the deck awnings seemed unbearably stagnant. McGuire therefore made

his way aft, and seated himself on the hatchway. Here he took out his cigarette-case and lit one cigarette from another. He was lightly clad, in a new grey alpaca suit, but the heat wilted his long, thin figure, and he turned only languid eyes to the stokers who came up from below in turns to snatch a breath of air.

His thoughts traveled back to the inevitable channel of money. He could see chances of a good deal of money ahead, if he played his cards well with Alverado. He knew that the Mexican was planning big and imposing schemes, but he did not know what those schemes were. If there was something crooked in it, all the better. He was ready to go in at a price, but he would make the price stiff. He eased his position on the hatchway. The *April Day*, cutting her way through oil-smooth water, was restfully quiet. A stoker came softly along the deck in the starlight and disappeared down the hatch next to the one he occupied. McGuire's thoughts dwelt with the man for a moment. He was glad it was not his business to swing a shovel in the engine-room in that heat—that wasn't life. His dreaming thoughts went back to his own affairs. His cigarette end pulsated, glowing and diminishing, a tiny point of light in the gloom.

Then something occurred that woke him from reveries with a start. Through the hatchway near him a man was slowly emerging. Another stoker, he thought, until something in the man's appearance startled him; and the man was ascending cautiously and noiselessly, as though not wishing to attract attention. In the starlight McGuire saw him, with back turned, a broad-shouldered, athletically poised fellow, wearing a tight sleeveless vest—a young man with a well-shaped head and close-cut dark hair.

For some minutes McGuire watched him. The man then slowly turned his head, and in the phosphorescent and ghostly light McGuire found himself looking into the face of the last man he had expected to see. For a moment he could not believe his senses; then, with an oath, he leapt to his feet.

"Biddeford!" he shouted.

"Shut your face!" cried Biddeford, springing to the deck and making after him. He was too late to get away. Biddeford grabbed him by the leg, and in another moment he was down with Biddeford on him, holding him by the throat.

For four weeks, by connivance with Sam and one of the engine-room hands, Martin had been stowed away. He had managed to slip aboard unseen at Hartlepool, and despite discomfort had fared fairly well on food Sam had been able to smuggle down to him during the voyage. But secrecy was the very essence of success in his venture. And now the ineffable McGuire had seen him, and that fact put a new complexion on the matter. At any cost McGuire's mouth must be kept shut until they reached port and Biddeford could make his escape from the ship. Martin had been as amazed as McGuire by the meeting, for he had no idea that the wireless operator was aboard. And now, as he leant over the prone figure looking down into the long, sallow face and black eyes, his old feeling of disgust swept over him.

"What are you doing aboard this ship?" he demanded in a low voice.

McGuire looked sullenly up at him and tightened his long mouth. His eyes roved away, seeking possible

assistance. A sound came to them. Someone was moving in their direction along the deck.

"It's none of your damned business," he retorted. "Let me up."

And suddenly, with his old cunning, he shouted for help at the top of his lungs. In a flash Martin lost his usually equable temper. He gripped the fellow by the throat, yanked him up as if he had been a doll, and dragged him towards the open hatch.

"Walk down or I'll pitch you down," he said in McGuire's ear.

For an instant McGuire hesitated, but something in the timbre of Biddeford's voice awoke terror in the deeps of his being. He descended the ladder, and Biddeford, by an old trick of his boyhood, slid down after him in a flash. They were in a dark gangway by the engine-room and McGuire, free of Biddeford's grip, recovered some of his old truculence.

"What are you going to do with me?" he demanded.

"I'm going to talk to you first, and bash your face in afterwards—that is, if you don't behave yourself! What are you doing aboard this ship, anyway?"

"I'm the wireless operator."

"I've been aboard a month," said Martin, "and I haven't noticed any aerals yet. Tell me something else."

McGuire had been thinking rapidly, and, having gathered together his scattered wits, he recalled that Biddeford was in a sailor-like rig of vest and trousers, yet he had never seen Biddeford among the crew. And why should he be among the crew, a man of good report with a master's ticket? In the gloom he laughed one of his thin, high-pitched laughs. After all, Biddeford could not hurt

him, and obviously Biddeford was not in a position to show himself in daylight aboard the *April Day*. What lay behind he could not guess, but he felt that the cards were in his hands.

"I guess it's you to tell me something. What are you doing aboard here? I guess when I tell Señor Alverado——"

"You won't tell him," interrupted Biddeford quickly. He had been wondering what to do with this incubus that had fallen into his hands, but McGuire's remark decided him.

"Come along aft with me," he said in a low, threatening tone, "and mark this, if you lift your voice, I'll give you another taste of what I handed you aboard the *Lachine*."

"I won't come," protested McGuire.

But Martin put an arm about him and forced him aft along the gangway, and presently he stopped and called in a guarded voice:

"Sam!"

A sound issued from the end of the gangway, and a moment later Sam Ducat appeared in the half-darkness.

"Is that you, Captain?" he asked in a low voice.

"Yes; I've got a man here who talks too much. I want you to help me close his face for him."

At this McGuire gave a sudden wrench, attempting to free himself, at the same time opening his mouth to shout. But Martin was ready for him—his hand stifled his cries. Then a rapid, whispered conversation took place between Ducat and Martin:

"We'll truss him up, Captain, and I'll mind him till it's my watch; then you can take him on."

"I don't trust him not to yell," Biddeford returned.

"I won't yell," put in McGuire suddenly and convulsively.

"I know a place," said Sam, speaking to Biddeford, "where he can yell blue blazes and nobody but rats'll hear him!"

Five minutes later McGuire, swathed in ropes, heard a cubby-hole door slide shut, and found himself in utter darkness.

* * * * *

Fortunately for Biddeford and Sam, no one saw the little drama of McGuire's capture, for at that moment Alverado, de Mattos, and Captain Jacobo were all sitting at the long table in the saloon, busy with plans for unloading the mysterious cargo which had been taken aboard at the mouth of the Tees. Alverado's plan was to unship this cargo by lighter at a quiet spot on the coast, and then to steam to Tampico innocently in ballast. During the greater part of that day a look-out had been kept for land and a signal from the shore, but it was not until long after dark, and an hour after McGuire's capture, that a quartermaster came hurrying into the chart-house with a message from the first officer, who was on the bridge.

"A signal from shore, señor," said the quartermaster.

All three men rose, and, headed by Alverado, ascended to the bridge. The first officer thrust a pair of binoculars into Alverado's hands and pointed shoreward.

"A green light, señor," said the first officer.

Tense with excitement, Alverado looked, and presently made out, low on the distant shore, a tiny point of green light. The light shone for a moment, vanished, and shone

again. It was the prearranged signal between Alverado and his confederate ashore, General Escabodo.

McGuire, in the darkness of his cubby-hole, saw nothing of the green light, but later, when the roar of the anchor-chain startled him like thunder, his spirits took an upward leap.

Sam Ducat, who had loitered near the gangway guarding him, would now, he thought, be called away. Then would come his chance of escape. He waited for an hour during much bustle and stamping on deck, but Sam still lingered outside. At last, in the small hours, when the ship had grown quiet, he heard a whispered conversation on the other side of the slide door. Biddeford and Sam were talking.

A few minutes later the cubby-hole door glided open, and McGuire was unceremoniously dragged forth. Then, trussed like a fowl, and with a big handkerchief over his mouth, Sam and Martin carried him on deck and thence to the ship-side. The decks were quiet and deserted, and the *April Day* was riding at anchor half a mile from a long, low shore.

Within five minutes of breathing free air again, McGuire was dexterously lowered into a dinghy, with Biddeford in the stern sheets and Sam at the oars.

The departure of the little craft from the *April Day* was managed with superb seamanship, and not a sound was heard as the boat glided away and vanished on the windless sea.

CHAPTER XIV

Two hours after their departure from the *April Day*, Biddeford leaned forward and slipped the lashings about McGuire.

"You can sit up now."

McGuire sat up.

"Where are you taking me?"

"Never mind," Martin answered.

"You'll pay for this, both of you."

"Shut up and admire the scenery," said Biddeford unfeelingly, "or we'll make you row."

In an impotent gust of fury, McGuire shook his fist. Sam and Biddeford, listening to his childish threats with amused faces, continued to row by turn. The sea was like a mill-pond. And at last, when the stars had paled and a tremulous, faint light of dawn appeared in the east, Biddeford rose in the boat, looked landward, and made a gesture.

"This will about do it, Sam," he ordered.

Sam turned and began to row towards the featureless sandbank. The sound of the surf, that had been a murmur, became a roar; for, despite the oily heaviness of the sea and the stillness, at a little distance from the shore the great rollers were curling and breaking. Biddeford took up his oars, and now together the two men pulled hard.

Ten minutes later the keel of the little craft ground

into the sand. Sam, with his singular, monkeyish movements, leapt waist-deep into the water, and dexterously dragged her up the beach.

Standing on the smooth, amber-colored sand, Martin looked about him. To landward, in the pallor of dawn, he could see the black outline of trees—thick, tropical foliage. The beach, with its utterly featureless sand, ran north and south as far as the eye could see. McGuire, who had been carrying his alpaca coat over his arm, drew it on, and Biddeford spoke to him.

"Now," he said, "if you make a line south by west, you will reach the railroad, and in a couple of days you will be in Mexico City. That's the best I can do for you."

McGuire walked up to him, and thrust forward his chin.

"I hope you know what it will mean to you when I see the British Minister in Mexico City." Then, lighting a cigarette, he threw the match derisively over his shoulder, and, with swaggering and contemptuous gestures, moved landward.

This was more than Biddeford could stand. He ran forward and landed a neatly placed kick on McGuire's retreating anatomy.

McGuire uttered a howl of rage, ran a few paces away into safety and shook a vicious fist.

"Wait," he shouted—"wait."

"Get along or I'll come after you again," threatened Biddeford.

McGuire, rubbing himself, turned and made his way landward without looking back again. He crossed the sand, ascended a slope, and found himself on the edge of a wood. The wood seemed to him full of creeping and

rustling life. The mystery and the darkness of it were not at all to his liking.

He moved away again, and dozed on a hillock of sand until daylight came. Then, finding a small river, he followed its overgrown banks for a mile or so, making as well as he could in the direction Biddeford had suggested. Presently he came upon a clearing with maize and bananas growing and a one-story bamboo-built house. A tight-breeched Mexican, in a tall hat, strode upon him with a distrustful air.

McGuire made gestures, indicating that he merely wished to find his way south, and, after a certain amount of pantomime, the man led him through what proved to be a narrow fringe of trees along the shore, and finally out upon a mule-track. Here he left him, making him understand that there would be passers-by soon who would conduct him on his way; then, puzzled by McGuire's appearance upon that barren strip of coast, he left him.

Within an hour a train of half a dozen mules appeared, plodding slowly along beneath heavy packs. The first muleteer halted, looked at McGuire with puzzled eyes, and finally agreed to take him along with him. McGuire, who was all a landsman, knew nothing of the direction they were making; but if he kept in company of the mule-train he was bound, he believed, to strike some kind of town or village in the end. He left it at that, and spent the hours of slow progress that followed in nursing his hate of Biddeford. When evening came on, hot, and utterly weary, he was glad to find the train turn down a narrow path that opened upon the shore. He could hear the roar of the surf at last, and a cool breeze from the

water revived him. He had been walking along a path between sand and palm-trees for an hour, however, before his attention became focussed on a large vessel showing no lights, but apparently stationary some way out to sea. He watched this vessel as the mule-train plodded slowly along, and suddenly he laughed. His face took on a new expression, for the vessel was the *April Day*! The mule-train, in its tortuous journey, had been making a northerly and not a southward course, and he had never been aware of the fact.

Chance, in fact, was conspiring to enable him to outwit Biddeford after all. He began to talk and gesticulate to the muleteer at his side; the man nodded at the sight of the steamer, but could make nothing of McGuire's excitement. Finally, the caravan turned inland again, and McGuire, signifying his intention to leave them, offered to pay for the food he had received on the journey. The Mexicans, however, would accept nothing, and went away with smiles and hand-waves.

After that McGuire made his way along, but it was dark before he reached the point upon the shore opposite which the *April Day* was riding at anchor. He could see the vessel now as a black silhouette in the night sky. A lighter was at her side, and she was still unloading. McGuire shouted, waved his arms, but was unseen from the vessel.

Finally, as he was pacing the shore impatiently, he saw to landward a faint gleam of light, possibly a quarter of a mile away. He advanced upon this, and found, on the fringe of the forest, a single-story bamboo house such as he had first seen that morning. Through the interstices of its walls a light was shining. Intense excitement was

upon him now. He wanted to get to Alverado with the news that Biddeford had been aboard his ship, and of his own ill-treatment. He began to run.

Suddenly a man leapt up from behind a hillock of sand and levelled a rifle at him. A word unknown rang through the darkness. Two more armed men appeared as by magic out of the sand. McGuire, who knew no word of Spanish, lifted his hands above his head and shouted aloud in English, giving the name of Sebastian Alverado as clear an utterance as he could. He felt that, in some way, these armed men must be connected with Alverado.

A torrent of words passed between two of the men, who advanced towards him, the third man meanwhile covering him with his rifle. McGuire gestured the bamboo dwelling. One of the men, at an order, turned and entered the hut. A stream of golden light poured out upon the sand as he opened the door. A pause ensued.

McGuire was conscious of darkness, populated by a great many moving, unseen men. He could hear the near-by jingle of harness, and, out at sea, the cough and pulsation of the *April Day's* donkey engine.

Suddenly the door of the hut opened, and José de Mattos came briskly out.

"Ah!" he exclaimed in English, "you are the wireless man, McGuire. How came you to be here?"

"I want to see Señor Alverado," said McGuire curtly, recognizing the bald, fat man. "I must see the Señor Alverado; it is important."

"You had no permit to come ashore," de Mattos retorted sharply. "The señor is not pleased."

"I don't care whether he is pleased or not; I want to

see him. It's important, I tell you! I didn't come ashore by my own will; I was brought ashore by force."

"I don't understand. You must explain."

"I will explain to Señor Alverado."

De Mattos looked thoughtful for a moment.

"The señor is busy."

"Tell him what I have told you—that I was brought ashore by force, and that one of the ship's boats has been stolen. He will see me then fast enough."

De Mattos turned and went into the house. In two minutes he was again in the doorway, beckoning.

"This way, Mr. McGuire," he invited.

CHAPTER XV

MCGUIRE followed de Mattos into the bamboo dwelling, and the door closed behind him. He found himself in a well-lighted, large room, occupied by a dozen men. Heaped upon a table in the middle were twenty or thirty brand-new automatic pistols, and in distant corners he could see what he believed to be gleaming barrels of piled rifles. In a place of honor at the head of the big table stood a man of fifty, with quick-moving dark eyes, imperial chin beard, and long moustache. The man was of a commanding air and wore a military uniform. Ranged at the table were half a dozen dark-skinned men of a superior class, all of them well dressed, all intent on the soldier's words. Among them, wearing a white suit, and towering above his fellows, was Sebastian Alverado.

"Pardon me, General," Alverado said, leaning towards the speaker at the head of the table; "I wish to have a word with this man; he is the wireless operator of whom you know."

General Escabodo bowed, and Alverado rose and moved towards his visitor, looking at him with a cold, searching gaze. His manner had lost the surface cordiality the wireless operator had experienced from him aboard the *April Day*.

"What brings you ashore?" he demanded.

McGuire, in no pleasant temper, truculently returned his gaze.

"You want to know why I am ashore, Señor Alverado?"

"I want you to be brief. You have interrupted an important conference."

"Well," returned McGuire, still not liking the harshness of his manner, "I was brought ashore, tied by the feet, by a man you did not know was aboard the *April Day*."

"Of whom do you speak?"

"Of a man who came from England in your engine-room. He had the laugh of you for three or four weeks, and has got it now. Perhaps he's got more than that."

"What man is this?"

"Captain Martin Biddeford."

Alverado's expression changed; he repeated the words slowly. For a moment his eyelids flickered, and McGuire, seeing that he had startled him, smiled sourly.

"Biddeford," said Alverado aloud at last, "what do you know of him?"

"He was my captain on the *Lachine*."

"He was not on board the *April Day*?"

McGuire answered confidently:

"He was, señor; he was stowed away at Hartlepool."

"Where is the man now?"

"The Lord knows. He and one of your hands, called Ducat, put me ashore miles from here."

"In what direction?"

"To the south. I was assaulted by Biddeford, and ordered to beat it to Mexico City."

Alverado turned in his lower lip and bit it. Then his eye passed on to where José de Mattos was lounging near

the door. He signalled the stout man towards him with a beckoning finger.

"José," he said, "you desired another meeting with your friend Biddeford."

De Mattos flushed darkly, and his eyes hardened, but he said nothing.

"The Captain is in Mexico, José," went on Alverado. "Perhaps you will be fortunate enough to deal with him after all."

"Ah!" exclaimed de Mattos, looking sharp enquiry at McGuire.

"It's true," said McGuire.

"You still desire to meet him, José?" Alverado questioned.

"It's my one desire in life."

An ugly gleam lit in his eyes.

"Good! You have a reason, as the French say. I will arrange it for you. His Excellency shall provide you with men—a sufficient number of men, José, to make your vengeance a certainty."

Alverado's lip curled in a slight expression of contempt. De Mattos, vivid and eager for vengeance, laid a hand on his arm.

"When will His Excellency grant me these men, señor?"

"To-night; you shall choose them yourself, José."

Alverado turned again to the table, but his manner was a little less care-free than before.

McGuire's information that Biddeford had been aboard the *April Day* since the vessel left Hartlepool had surprised and startled him. And yet the news was not entirely unfavorable, for Biddeford, in following him, had deliberately placed his head in the jaws of the lion. He

and the soldierly man with the imperial, and these other dark-skinned, purposeful individuals, were a force in Mexico. The men in that bamboo-walled, palm-roofed hut were, in fact, the nucleus of a proposed new Government, the heart and motive power of a force of at least eight thousand revolutionary adherents of General Escabodo. All of them awaited only the word to attempt one of those numerous *coups d'état* which are a habit in Latin America. General Escabodo had been an officer with Porfirio Diaz, and had learnt his warfare under that great empire-builder. He thirsted for power now on his own account, and, being a narrow-minded, retrogressive individual, he had dreamed egotistical dreams. He saw himself dimming even the glory of the mighty Diaz. Tonight he was at work trying to realize his dreams. He believed that, of a surety, before many weeks were past his power would be supreme. He could foretell the day when he, too, like Diaz, would ride triumphant into Mexico City.

Alverado, cold, intellectual, subtle, another type altogether, turned to the General now and spoke, giving him a description of Biddeford, and asking that revolutionary emissaries in Tampico should be deputed to find out and deal with him.

"In my opinion, the presence of this man in Mexico is of little importance, señor," returned the General, with a grandiose sweep of the hand.

"His presence here is more important than you think," Alverado quietly warned him. He knew that with a blustering man a quiet man is most effective of all. "This Captain Biddeford represents a department of the British Foreign Office. He is an acknowledged agent, both

daring and dangerous, and where he is, there are sure to be others. I am speaking from knowledge, General."

General Escabodo, whose mind was upon other and larger issues, gave him a moment's attention.

"In that case he shall be found and—what then, señor?"

"That," Alverado answered, "we can safely leave to Señor de Mattos here. There can be an accident—a street brawl. De Mattos will arrange it well. These things are not difficult to originate, General."

The General nodded and turned to a man on his right, a high-cheeked, eagle-nosed fellow, whose Indian blood showed in his slit eyes and scant beard.

"You," he said—"you will take orders from Don Sebastian and Don José in regard to this Englishman."

José de Mattos, who had heard this order, moved round the room and stood at Alverado's elbow.

"This time I shall not fail you," he whispered.

Alverado now turned again to McGuire.

"Mr. McGuire, you will please return to the ship; I will see you aboard the *April Day* to-night."

The wireless man bowed and made a sullen exit.

When the door had closed upon him, Alverado walked to the table and seated himself. From his inner pocket he drew out a folded slip of paper, which he laid before General Escabodo.

"I would like your signature to this agreement between us, General," he requested.

"I will sign nothing, nothing," Escabodo announced imperiously. "My word, señor, is sufficient."

"The concession which I have here," said Alverado, drawing from his pocket another document, the type-written sheet Biddeford had once held in his hands, "is

worth fifteen million dollars more to-day than it was a year ago."

General Escabodo nodded.

"It was irregularly conceded to the American Corporation," said Alverado, looking meaningly into Escabodo's face, and then glancing about the table. "Gentlemen," he said, "is not that your opinion also?"

"Absolutely," they all agreed.

"In actual point of law," said one man, a sharp-featured, legal-looking man in a dark suit, "that concession has no existence. It is neither the property of the Americans nor of the British Government, which believes that it has bought it from the American possessors. It is no more, in fact," he said oratorically, with a wave of his hand, "than so much waste paper."

"Señor," said Alverado, bowing across the table, "you have phrased this matter with the utmost neatness. Your high legal attainments will no doubt be suitably remembered on the great day."

He leaned back and looked at General Escabodo.

The General pointed to the document with its signatures and the large red seal of the Mexican Republic.

"These signatures, gentlemen," he said, "will not bind the new Mexican Government. I have given my word as the head of the new Government to repudiate this concession, which is illegal, and to reconstitute it in the name and as the property of Don Sebastian Alverado."

Sebastian Alverado eyed him keenly for a moment, took up the sheet of paper, the agreement between them which he had placed upon the table for signature, and ostentatiously tore it into fragments.

"The word of the new President of the Republic is law," he said slowly.

Triumph glowed in Alverado's eyes. The concession was now undoubtedly his to sell to the highest bidder.

CHAPTER XVI

"WHERE's the British Consul's, Sam?"

"Up in the Calle Mayer," answered Sam Ducat. "We had better take a hack, Captain."

The two friends were outside the station at Tampico. It was late afternoon, but the heat was still terrific—the town like a furnace. Signalling a hack which came leisurely towards them, Martin gave the address of the British Vice-Consul, and climbed in, followed by Sam.

At the Vice-Consul's office Biddeford alighted, told the driver to wait, and a few minutes later was asking an overworked young clerk if there were any letters for him. The young man looked the singular couple over with the eye of curiosity. Biddeford, bronzed to a mahogany color, was shabbily dressed in an old blue flannel suit and wore, carried on the back of his head, a cheap wide-brimmed native hat. Beside him stood Sam Ducat, a short, vastly broad, gorilla-like figure, also in a high-crowned hat with a brim like a cart-wheel. Even the well-mannered clerk, retiring to an inner room, smiled a little at the figure Sam cut, in a linen suit that was once white, with no collar, and a tight, thin vest that outlined the muscles of his mighty chest.

"You are Captain Biddeford?" the clerk enquired, returning to the office.

"Yes."

"There are two letters for you," said the clerk, "and the Vice-Consul would like to have a word with you."

Martin asked Sam to wait for him; then followed the clerk into an inner and private room.

Here he found the Vice-Consul, a handsome man of early middle age, one of the greatest tarpon fishermen in the world. Martin was signalled to a chair, seated himself, and waited.

"I have been expecting you for the past week," the Vice-Consul said. "Confidential instructions were sent to me that you would arrive by the *April Day*, which has been in port since Tuesday." He looked enquiringly across at his visitor.

"I did come on the *April Day*—anyway, part of the way," explained Biddeford, and related briefly the circumstances which had caused his delay in arrival.

"I was further instructed to say," went on the Vice-Consul, "that should you desire to send any special wires, or need advice of any kind, I am entirely at your service."

"Thank you," Biddeford said; "if you don't mind, I will open these letters; there may be some news here."

He tore open the first letter, which bore a British stamp. Within was a typewritten page, phrased in the manner usual with Lord Hyde, which ran:

"MY DEAR CAPTAIN BIDDEFORD,

"On your arrival in Tampico, after reporting to the Vice-Consul, and if there is no pressing necessity for your stay there, kindly leave for Mexico City. Call there at the British Ministry and ask to see Mr. Quilliam, who will supply you with such funds as you may be in need of. Kindly remember that I am relying on you to bring back the required article. I have the most absolute confidence in your success on this occasion. You will meet

friends in Mexico City who will put you *au courant* with the latest news, and to whom kindly convey my warmest greetings.

“Yours very sincerely,
“HYDE OF CODSALL.”

“This is a letter of instructions from my chief,” said Biddeford, when he had finished.

“From Lord Hyde?” smiled the Consul.

“Yes, ordering me to go to Mexico City.”

“You will go——”

“By the next train,” said Biddeford, “whenever that is.” He had not opened his second letter, and was glancing at it curiously. The stamp was a Mexican one, and the letter contained but one single line in a handwriting unknown to him. It read as follows:

“Welcome to Mexico.—JOSÉ DE MATTOS!”

“You can catch a train to-night,” His Majesty’s representative was saying. “I am sorry you have to go so soon, but you will like Mexico City. It is a town full of gaiety—and surprises.”

Biddeford folded de Mattos’ letter, placed it in his inner pocket, bade farewell to the Consul, and went out in a deeply thoughtful mood.

* * * * *

On the afternoon when Biddeford and Sam presented themselves at the Vice-Consulate in Tampico, McGuire found himself in Mexico City wearing better clothes than he had ever worn in his life before, and swelling with importance and mystery, for he realized now that he was

no ordinary man, and that his employer, Alverado, was also no ordinary man. The tall Mexican was, indeed, that envied of mortals, a man with a bottomless purse. McGuire could swear to this, for his own pocketbook at the moment was corpulent with notes, given him by Alverado. And he was dwelling at an hotel costing three pounds a day, with nothing to do but wait for orders. At the present moment he occupied a low rocking-chair near the window of this hotel, and looked out upon the Plaza Reforma. Alverado had made it clear that at any moment a summons might come for him to take up his duties at the head of a squad of native wireless operators. But in the meantime he was free to wait and to enjoy himself, to stretch his legs and smoke his cigarettes—to lead, in fact, the supine life induced by plenteous and good food and blazing sunshine.

During the past few days, Biddeford, and the indignity Biddeford had put upon him, had slipped into the recesses of McGuire's memory. But if the thoughts of his late Captain were at present not uppermost in his mind, the hatred he felt for him had in no way diminished. Time, which had served him so well of late, might provide opportunities for revenge, even upon Biddeford. There were two things in the past which McGuire could never forget. One was the escape of Edna Morris from the *Lachine*, as he believed, by Biddeford's complicity, thereby robbing him of ten thousand dollars. The other was his seizure by Biddeford and Ducat aboard the *April Day*.

A servant who was known as a waiter, but looked like a villain in a cowboy film, came forward and spread a napkin over a soiled portion of the white cloth. This done, he handed the menu card to McGuire, leaned against

the table, looked out into the street, and waited for the guest to choose his meal. McGuire made his choice. The waiter nodded and went away, moving past other tables and other waiters, all equally melodramatic-looking and casual in manner. McGuire recalled that Mexico is very much a republic.

When his meal was finished, he donned a panama that he had bought that day in the Calle San Francisco, and sauntered forth, launching himself into the street of this amazing city, which is seven thousand feet above the sea, and over which tower two mighty snowclad mountains.

The wonder and romance of the scene occupied him, stirring even his narrow and selfish nature. The magnificent Plaza Reforma, a thoroughfare equal to the Champs Elysée in Paris, was crowded. A band was playing, and scores of carriages and motors glided along at a measured pace. The evidence of wealth amazed him. He saw beautiful and unbeautiful Spanish ladies leaning back in limousines driven by English and French chauffeurs, and carriages of superlatively caparisoned horses driven by mahogany Indians smoking cigars.

The evening sky was of a pallid opal hue, the air warm. Slanting sunlight flashed and glittered on western windows. A murmur of unceasing Spanish voices sounded in his ears, and in the distance the municipal string band discoursed seductive, languorous, and melancholy music. McGuire drew in his breath deeply. Six weeks ago he had been kicking his heels in Liverpool in a cheap lodging without a cent in his pocket, and now . . . For some minutes he luxuriated in the present. Then a doubt came to him. After all, he was no more than an employee of Sebastian Alverado. And who was Alverado? What

was Alverado's status among these brilliant, rich, poor, and middling Mexicans who now surrounded him? And what was his game? The big man had tried to befog McGuire, but McGuire was sly. A few nights ago, in that hut on the shore, he sensed that military or political events were afoot. What was Sebastian about to attempt?

The thought that Alverado and his friends could seek to upset the order and tranquillity of the scene which now surrounded him appeared suddenly to McGuire as preposterous. And yet, in Mexico, strange things had aforetime occurred—irruptions, revolutions, political *coups d'état*. . . .

He was nearer the band now. He saw the musicians in brilliant uniforms, the population circling about the bandstand, men one way, women another, a singular native custom. And he fell to further wondering. What if Alverado failed? Where would he (McGuire) be then? Alverado, seeking his own safety, would drop him like a hot brick.

The thought of these possibilities gripped him, and grew enormous and threatening. His flaccid nature suddenly recoiled in fear. He passed a nervous hand over his face, then turned and hurried back towards his hotel. He wanted to think this thing out in quiet. He was not on the top of the heap, as he had begun to think, after all. Rather he was on the top of a volcano. There was a volcano up there dominating the city, snowcovered, roseate and glittering in the setting sun. Popocatepetl, they called it; but that was extinct, whereas his volcano——

At a corner turning into the Paseo de la Reforma, a string of carriages had halted at the raised hand of a policeman. In the soft evening light he could see fair

faces beneath the hoods. Opulent black-bearded men and black-moustached men talked with animation to pallid, languid-looking ladies.

The white-gloved policeman holding up the traffic removed his embargo, and the carriages moved forward. In one of them McGuire saw a grey-haired man of military appearance, at whose side was seated an elegant woman a little past middle age. The man wore evening clothes, and pinned to the lapel of his coat was a miniature row of orders—British most of them. This distinguished man's countenance was unmistakably British in cast, and awakened McGuire's interest. Then, as the carriage approached, he observed from the sidewalk that there was a third occupant of the vehicle, a young lady enfolded in a satin opera cloak. McGuire had time to remark inwardly on the richness of her dark hair, when the carriage glided by and he uttered a gasp of amazement.

For a minute he halted stock-still in the crowded street and stared open-mouthed. He would have known that beautiful and temperamental face anywhere, even if a hundred years had elapsed. The thought came to him to run in pursuit. But the carriage, now clear of the press of traffic, was already speeding along the broad street. As McGuire watched it diminishing in the distance, amazement gave place to something else on his narrow face. A cruel light—a light of cupidity—slowly possessed his features. Edna Morris, Edna Morris, Edna Morris—the words reverberated through his brain. He had seen Edna Morris. And he stared, stock-still.

Suddenly he pulled himself together, turned, and hurried back to his hotel. In the hotel reception-room he found a copy of the well-edited *English Herald*, and look-

ing down the printed list of English and American visitors sought for the name of Edna Morris. There was no such name to be found. All the same, he had seen Edna Morris driving in the Plaza de la Reforma ten minutes ago. He would swear to that.

His thoughts reached back, and he recalled a moment aboard the *Lachine* when her jewelled hand had touched his. On that occasion she had sat in his wireless cabin and had tricked him into talking and gabbling like an idiot. All the time a reward had been offered for her capture—a reward which should have been his.

That was two months ago, and he had let her slip through his fingers, but this time there should be no failure. It was one thing to slip from the *Lachine*; it would be totally another thing to vanish from this Mexican city, where every English and American visitor is registered with the police. And then, to make matters easier, Miss Morris had not seen him. There could be no suspicion in her mind that she had been recognized. These facts, taken together, suddenly put McGuire in the highest spirits.

He seized his hat and hurried towards the door. Late as it was, he had resolved to find the American Consul and to place the whole story before him. It was his duty to do it, he told himself. That reward—he had been robbed of it once, but not this time—no, no. Without a shadow of doubt it would be his. He could already feel his pockets bulging with it. What an astounding piece of luck it was that he had taken that evening walk!

CHAPTER XVII

THE American Vice-Consul happened to be in when McGuire appeared breathlessly at his house fifteen minutes later. He looked shrewdly into the young man's face and demanded his business.

"I take it, Mr. McGuire, that your business is urgent?"

"It is," said McGuire. "I am here to give information concerning a woman named Edna Morris. She is wanted by the New York police for the murder of Norman Grant, of the Grant Corporation!"

The Consul turned to his desk, drew a writing-block towards him, then looked sharply at his visitor.

"Well, Mr. McGuire, and what is your information?" McGuire had not impressed him favorably, and his tone was not cordial.

"I saw the woman I mention not half an hour ago in the Paseo de la Reforma. She was in company of an elderly man and a woman in evening dress."

He gave a brief account of Miss Morris's escape from the *Lake Lachine*. The Consul made notes on his pad, then looked up.

"I would like to know, Mr. McGuire, why you are so particularly interested in this matter? What's your status in regard to it?"

McGuire shuffled in his chair, and stretched his long legs.

"I am here solely in the interests of justice."

"Justice?" repeated the Consul. He was silent for a moment, jabbing at his blotting-pad with a pencil-end.

"Your information will, of course, have to be confirmed from New York."

"It will be confirmed all right," McGuire answered confidentially. "You don't think, Consul, there will be any difficulty in finding her?"

"None whatever," said the Consul. "Which way along the Paseo de la Reforma was she driving?"

McGuire told him.

"And the time?"

McGuire told him the time.

"The elderly man with her looked like an Englishman?"

"He looked like an old army officer," said McGuire—"wore English orders on his coat."

The Consul was again silent for a moment or two.

"The fact that he wore orders," he said, "and was driving in that direction indicates that he was attending a function at the British Minister's house. It looks to me as though the young lady's friends are persons of consequence."

He scrutinized McGuire's features. The young man was unprepossessing without a doubt—unprepossessing as to his cigarette-stained fingers, his restless eyes, and, more than all, his petulant and nervous-looking mouth. But there were no signs of wildness about him, and he had made a statement which appeared to be well within probability. If by some extraordinary chance the woman he had seen was a woman being sought for by the New York police, the Consul's business was to act in the usual manner.

"What is the procedure, sir, in a case of this kind?" asked McGuire.

The Consul assumed a less curt tone.

"In this case," he said, "if you care to go to the expense of my wiring to the New York Police at once——" He looked enquiringly at his visitor.

McGuire nodded.

"Certainly, wire at my expense," he said.

"Well, if the police take the matter up," went on the Consul, "and there is anything in it—if your surmise turns out to be correct, that is—the next move will be to obtain a provisional extradition warrant."

He rose.

"That's all," he said, and, with a slight bow, turned to go.

McGuire moved towards the door, then paused. He looked back over his shoulder and said with a self-conscious smile:

"In a case of this kind, Consul, I suppose, if there happens to be a reward——"

He had crossed the room and stopped now within a yard of the door.

"I'm afraid I don't get you."

"What I mean is," explained McGuire, "in the case of a reward being offered by the police or anybody, I suppose the person who conveys the information that leads to arrest gets it?"

The Consul still did not get his meaning.

"That is," persisted McGuire, "if anybody should offer a reward for the arrest of Miss Morris——"

The Consul's face suddenly hardened.

"That is not a matter for present discussion," he said curtly, and turned to his desk.

McGuire left the office, and during the days that followed, lived in a fever. He spent many dollars in second-class red-flagged hacks driving about the city, hoping for a further glimpse of Edna Morris. His eagerness was not rewarded, however. But on the afternoon of the second day he received a brief note from the American Consul requesting him to attend the National Theatre with two men who would call for him at his hotel. These men McGuire found not at all companionable. They were large taciturn Americans, who made it apparent that they held him in contempt.

If these two men, whose business in life was the detection of crime, could have done so, they would have joyfully taken McGuire up the nearest side-street and kicked him long and hard. As it was, the manner of each was frigidly polite.

Three tickets were bought, and in the evening McGuire and the detectives entered the large theatre. McGuire stared about him. The scene was brilliant and strange in his eyes; the National Theatre, which can hold two thousand people, was nearly full, and as the fashionably dressed arrivals in the boxes began to appear his eyes swept each little group. But when the curtain rose there was no sign of Edna Morris, nor did he see the distinguished-looking couple who had accompanied her in the carriage three nights earlier.

He relapsed back in his fauteuil, and applied his languid attention to the stage. Then one of his companions, who had been looking up at a particular box, touched his arm.

"There's a young woman up there," he said, "and a good looker, too! What about her?"

In a flash McGuire turned and lifted his eyes.

Seated in a box in the second tier, her hands resting on the cushioned forefront, wearing a white evening dress, her hair plainly coiffeured, but lovely as ever, was the woman he had sought with such feverish energy. She was leaning forward smiling, and fluttering a fan delicately, in a hand which gleamed with jewels.

"That your woman?"

"That's Edna Morris," said McGuire, in a tense whisper. He paused, staring up at her, amazed to find her there, and bewildered by her self-possession and beauty.

"Do you think you'll get her?" he asked.

"Sure, Mike, we'll get her," answered the detective.

CHAPTER XVIII

BIDDEFORD, on his arrival in Mexico City, reported himself with Sam at the British Legation. It was early afternoon when the two stepped into the Legation patio, and an attaché, as impeccable in appearance as young Gornal himself, received them with suave politeness.

"You are Captain Biddeford?" asked the young man. His eyes went for a moment from Biddeford to his strange companion, for Sam still wore his wreck of a linen suit, and still carried his native high-crowned hat.

"Yes, I'm Captain Biddeford," Martin informed the attaché, "and this is my friend Sam Ducat."

The attaché bowed.

"How do you do, Mr. Ducat?" he remarked.

"Nicely, thankee; I hope you are the same," Sam responded breezily.

"The Consul in Tampico gave me a letter," explained Martin, "telling me to report here as soon as I arrived; I assumed you would have instructions about me."

"The instructions came a week ago," answered the attaché; "perhaps you will be good enough to come this way." He glanced questioningly at Ducat.

"Sam," said Martin, "will you wait here?"

"Aye," said Sam; "it will suit me better."

Biddeford followed the impeccable young man. A flight of stairs was ascended, and the attaché led him into a room overlooking the street—an airy, spacious apartment, with a single occupant, who stood at the window

with a cigar between his lips. This personage, as the two men entered the room, came forward with hand outstretched.

Martin uttered an exclamation.

"How did you get here, Colonel?"

Colonel Everdale laughed.

"I've been here for a week waiting for you. You are a sailor, Biddeford; you ought to know that an old tub like the *April Day* is not the fastest craft you could have chosen to cross the Atlantic in."

"I didn't choose her, fate chose her for me," Martin answered, "and devilish uncomfortable she was."

"Does Alverado know you are here?" put in the Colonel.

"I'm afraid he does," Martin admitted.

Colonel Everdale pulled at his moustache.

"That's unfortunate. However, he was bound to find out sooner or later, and the fight might just as well take place in the open. Since you left Hartlepool, Biddeford, we have discovered that Alverado is acting in concert with a revolutionary, General Escabodo. My business here is to lay all the facts in our possession before the Mexican Government, and incidentally to help you recover the concession. To-night His Excellency has invited you to dine here. After dinner we can talk matters out," said the Colonel.

Biddeford looked down at his battered clothes.

"I can't get a new rig-out by to-night, and these are practically all the clothes I have," he said.

"Give me the address of your hotel, and you shall have everything you want in time for dinner," said Everdale.

An hour later Martin was in the room he had taken in the Hôtel Pino del Oro, when a messenger from the Legation arrived outside his door and stood there whistling, to show that, if he happened to be temporarily employed carrying a parcel from one subject of the British monarchy to another, he was still a free-born republican.

Under his arm he carried a large brown packet.

"Sign the receipt," he said to Martin, handing him a book, and leaving him to find a pencil himself.

Two minutes later Martin was looking down upon a full complement of evening clothes—suit, shirt, collar, and tie.

Sam Ducat, who had been seated near the window looking out at the crowded street, waited until Martin had arrayed himself in a suit that fitted him almost as though made for him; then he turned. His eyes traveled over Biddeford from head to foot, and a sound came from him as of repressed emotion.

"It makes me laugh, Captain."

"What does?"

"Seein' you in them things; I never seen them on a real man afore. It makes me laugh."

That was all Biddeford could get out of him on the subject. A few minutes later Martin departed for the British Legation. Immediately on his arrival, even before he was presented to the British Minister, he found his hand gripped cordially by Colonel Everdale.

"I want to have a word with you before you see His Excellency," said the Colonel. Then, as he led Martin towards the drawing-room, he laid a hand on the younger man's arm, and halted for a moment.

"There's someone here whom you have met before, Captain."

"Your wife?" suggested Martin.

"My wife is here," said the Colonel, "but I am referring now to my daughter."

"I shall be delighted to meet Miss Everdale," responded Biddeford, "but I am afraid it will be for the first time."

He looked into Colonel Everdale's lean, bronzed face, with the cropped grey hair and grey moustache. The Colonel, slim as a boy, despite his years, made a handsome figure, and there was something like contrition in his manner as he slipped his arm through Martin's and led him forward.

"Perhaps you will forgive me when you see my girl again," he said; "she can make her own explanations. All I need to do is to apologize for my part in a deception which is no longer necessary."

Martin's brain was working with astonishing rapidity.

"Is your daughter's name Edna, Colonel?" he asked eagerly.

"It is," the Colonel answered, and led him through an open door into a room where a dozen guests were waiting the summons to dinner.

Martin's eyes swept the room and alighted upon Mrs. Everdale, who came forward with hand outstretched and a gracious smile of greeting on her face.

"You are to take my daughter in," she said in a cordial voice; "she has much to say to you." Then, turning, she beckoned someone from a little group near the window. A moment later Edna Morris, whom he had last seen in the flat in Bedford Square, was crossing the room towards Martin. The girl was dressed with the

taste and distinction which had characterized her aboard the *Lachine*, and she was as brilliantly beautiful as ever. Her hand slipped into his, and she looked up into his eyes.

"How nice it is to see you again, Captain!" she remarked, with a flash of her white teeth.

Martin, busy gathering his scattered senses, bowed.

"I understand," he said, "that I am to take you in to dinner."

Miss Everdale nodded.

"His Excellency," she said, "knows everything from the beginning. He thought perhaps we should have a good deal to talk about."

"Yes," Martin observed, "there are a good many things that need explaining. The last time we met you were not communicative."

"Perhaps," she said, with a glance up into his grim face, "you will find Miss Everdale more talkative than the runaway Edna Morris."

"I hope so."

At that moment Colonel Everdale drew Martin away, and presented him to the British Minister. Later, however, during a dinner which seemed to him good, he learnt what he had guessed himself, that Edna Morris had all along been in Lord Hyde's service, and had actually been in Norman Grant's office on the night of the financier's murder.

"Are you acting for Lord Hyde now?" Biddeford asked.

The girl shook her head.

"I merely begged my father to let me come here, in case I might be of use." She was seated at Biddeford's side eating an ice with a languid, casual air, as though she

had never strayed out of that luxurious and sheltered order of life.

"Another thing that made me want to get away," Miss Everdale informed him, "was the curiosity of the American police. They are still looking for the person who was guilty of that dreadful murder, and unfortunately the Americans are suspicious of me."

"The density of the police forces of the world is proverbial," remarked Biddeford lightly.

A few minutes later the party rose, and for the rest of that evening Martin listened to Miss Everdale, detailed his own adventures, and arranged his thoughts.

Then, after what seemed to him the briefest of evenings, he found himself outside the Legation and beneath the stars. Afterwards so busy was he with the beauteous vision of Miss Everdale that he could hardly recall whether he walked back to his hotel or drove there in a taxi.

And when he rose in the morning he told his shaving-mirror that Edna Everdale was the one desirable girl in the world, and that, if the fates were propitious—— Then he stopped, called himself a presumptuous fool, and went over his tanned skin a second time. His spirits were soon to ascend again, however, for later that day he received an invitation to dine with the Everdales, and accompany them afterwards to the opera. The invitation, and Miss Everdale's friendliness during the dinner, sent his spirits sky-high. But when the party was seated at length in a box at the theatre, Martin began to feel a little less hopeful. He came to earth, as it were, and looked the situation sternly and squarely in the face. Who was he to aspire to the brilliant and delicately nur-

tured girl at his side? He was without connections or prospects. When his present adventures in Lord Hyde's service were at an end, what lay before him? Nothing. He could see only an unprofitable career at sea, endless crossing and re-crossing the Atlantic as captain of a liner in a fifth-rate company.

A burst of music ascended from the stage, a roar of applause followed, and the curtain descended on the first act of "Faust." Then Biddeford started, and awoke from dreams. He was not much of a dreamer or a sentimentalist by nature, and his own mood surprised and depressed him.

"A penny for your thoughts," said Edna, leaning towards him and touching him lightly with her fan.

"They are not worth a penny," he said.

The manner in which she looked at him over her shoulder exhibited her eyes to perfection. He wondered if she knew that. His own face was grave. There was something written upon his tanned features which she had never seen there before, an expression that chilled her. She longed to read the riddle of that something, to ask him why his mood had changed so completely, but a strange timidity fell upon the girl. She lowered her eyes before his intense, solemn gaze, and color touched her cheeks.

When the opera was over and Biddeford parted from her, it seemed to him that her fingers rested momentarily in his.

"You are not sad?" she whispered. "There will be sunshine to-morrow." She turned, gathering her silken cloak about her, and sped away, following her father and mother.

That night Martin slept uneasily. McGuire and Alverado followed him through uncomfortable dreams. It seemed to him that on the stage of the vast National Theatre Alverado was playing the leading part. The Faust he had seen that night was Alverado—and there was a plaintive Marguerite, a Marguerite who was sometimes Edna and sometimes another person altogether. He felt in his dream that Detective Park was beside him, alternatively mocking at him and inviting him to play halma. McGuire in shirt-sleeves, assembling his wireless and tapping out what he believed to be a message of death, appeared before his vision. McGuire's voice out of depths as though from the bottom of the sea reached him. He could hear his own answer; "Blood money, blood money! . . ." A distressful and haunted night. In the morning, when he awoke from crowded nightmare—he rose early, and descended to the street for a promenade before breakfast—he was glad to see the new day.

And the sun was indeed shining.

* * * * *

Edna, looking from the window that same morning at the same hour, was singing softly to herself.

"You are gay this morning," remarked Mrs. Everdale.

"It's the climate, mother, I think. The sunshine and the people seem gay. There is something in the air that is infectious."

"Perhaps the something is in the rarefied air, and the fact that the city is seven thousand feet above the sea-level," said the Colonel, glancing over the top of his paper.

He saw Edna framed in the sun at the window, wearing a flowered muslin dress. The girl made a picture identical with one which had thrilled his heart twenty-five years

ago at sight of a certain daughter of Maryland who had given him the greatest thing the world has to give, and who still gave it to him.

"Come to breakfast, Edna, and you too, John," admonished Mrs. Everdale; "the coffee will be cold."

"Edna grows more like you were twenty years ago every day," said the Colonel.

"I was never as pretty as Edna," confessed the matron with a smile.

Edna and the Colonel broke into violent protest at this, and breakfast proceeded happily until one of the casual hotel servants entered and laid a letter on the table at the Colonel's side.

"The messenger wants an answer," said the man.

Everdale read the note; then passed it across to his wife.

"I think you and Edna ought to accept the invitation; it's from Señor Fernandez, one of the potentates of Mexico. He wants us to come out to his country house for dinner at one o'clock. I believe he has one of the most beautiful residences and parks in this country; but, apart from that, it's a matter of duty for us to go."

Edna, very much occupied with her thoughts, remarked quietly:

"You have not forgotten, father, that you have asked Captain Biddeford to call on us this evening?"

"No," said the Colonel, "but I can tell him that you and your mother may be late coming back. I will entertain him till you come. In any case, I cannot come with you to Señor Fernandez. Biddeford and I have an important meeting at one o'clock at the Legation, which we must not miss."

"How far is the Fernandez house, father?"

"Fourteen or fifteen miles on the Toluca road. The hotel will provide a car."

The outcome of this conversation was that at eleven-thirty Colonel Everdale drove in a hired hack to the British Legation, and half an hour later Edna and her mother entered a limousine provided by the hotel and were driven out along the Toluca road to the hospitality of the famous Fernandez family.

CHAPTER XIX

THE British Minister received Colonel Everdale in a spacious and finely furnished room. He gripped the Colonel's hand and led him to a chair, and offered drink and cigars. When Everdale was comfortably seated, he opened the conversation.

"Colonel," he said gravely and slowly, "I have been considering the reason for your visit to Mexico, and I want to warn you, out of a very long experience of this country, that you and your friend are engaged on a desperate adventure. You do not know Mexico or the light value such a creature as Alverado puts upon a man's life. You don't know the number of gunmen to be found here who, for fifty dollars, are willing to shoot a man down in his tracks any hour of the day or night. And in dealing with Alverado you are dealing also with General Escabodo. This man is a professional bravo, but he has a political following. No one knows exactly how many misguided citizens of this Republic are willing to cast in their lot with him, but every one of them, Everdale, is an enemy of yours and of Captain Biddeford. You follow me?"

"I am impressed," said the Colonel, "but I have every confidence in Biddeford."

"I am telling you all this formally," said the other, "so you may be prepared for a blow which may fall at any moment."

A few minutes later Martin Biddeford was summoned into the room. Martin, with the plentiful funds at his disposal, had added a white suit to his wardrobe, and as he stood now looking at the elder men, he appeared to teem with vitality.

"Undeniably a young man of capacity," thought the diplomat. "I want you, Captain," he said, suavely cordial, "to remain with me to dinner. It will be a quiet affair, with just we three, that will give us an opportunity to talk without restraint."

Biddeford expressed his thanks, and at one o'clock the three men went in to dinner together.

After the meal Colonel Everdale returned to his hotel and Martin found himself free until evening.

Biddeford's mind at dinner, and during the hours of that afternoon, had been busily occupied with the events of last night, and with the friendship which had grown into being between himself and Edna. At one time he told himself that he was a fool to waste his time in thinking of Edna, and at another time he asked himself, "Why not?"

He dressed in the evening with unusual care, and took a hack to the Everdales' hotel. Edna and her mother had not returned from their visit, and the Colonel received him alone. For an hour they smoked and talked; then the elder man began to show signs of anxiety. He went to the hotel bureau and asked if it were possible to telephone to the residence of Don Fernandez. After a time the messenger returned to say that there was no telephone to the residence of Don Fernandez. Colonel Everdale laughed away his fears, and commented upon the magnificent hospitality of Mexican society.

"Mexican hospitality," he said to Martin, "is sometimes a little overwhelming and long drawn out. I am afraid we must not expect them yet."

At nine o'clock Biddeford, feeling that to stay longer would be to overstay his welcome, rose to go. The Colonel accompanied him to the door of the hotel. He stood in the entrance to the patio until the young man had departed; then returned to his suite of apartments with lips somewhat tight together and a frown on his brow.

In the meantime, Martin, with a cigar in his mouth, strode along enjoying the night, the coolness of the air, and the bright animation of the crowded paseo.

Every inhabitant of the city seemed to be abroad, crowding the spacious sidewalks, driving in carriages, motors, and hacks. Biddeford found interest in the appearance of the crowd. But his evening had been a disappointment. After all, he had not seen Edna. And he was surprised to find himself a little piqued that she had not made an effort to return, knowing that he would be with her father.

As he walked along he glanced at every closed limousine that passed, hoping to catch a glimpse of her. His scrutiny was not rewarded, however, and when he turned from the Paseo de la Reforma into a quieter street, he paused and struck a match to light another cigar. It was now nine-fifteen. He had arranged to meet Sam Ducat at nine-thirty at the Café of the Holy Ghost, a pleasant little restaurant in a quiet thoroughfare off the main street. The character of the passers-by in this quiet thoroughfare was different from the European appearance of the multitude in the Paseo de la Reforma. A peon passed him wearing a colored blanket and a costly high-

crowned hat ornamented with silver. At a corner a policeman in a military-looking uniform lounged against a wall carrying a wire-framed lighted lantern in his hand. Four or five youths in white suits strolled by in animated talk, and uttered a greeting as they passed. Beyond this the street, with its single-storied, windowless houses looking blank and mysterious, appeared to be deserted.

Biddeford was inwardly commenting on the quiet, when he became aware that footsteps behind him were proceeding in the same direction as himself. He listened, and it seemed to him that whoever was coming towards him was endeavoring to attract as little attention as possible.

To satisfy himself as to the intention of the owners of the cautious footfalls, he halted at a little shop doorway, now closed and with an inner blind drawn. Here he looked at the street dimly reflected in the window glass, pretending to relight his cigar. The footfalls behind him ceased. No one passed the window. He was sure now that the owners of the cautious footsteps were following him, and the fact seemed to jolt him from a region of dreams into a very actual and eventful present.

He was being followed, and he had been followed since he emerged from the Paseo de la Reforma. Why?

Were the two men behind him an accidental couple of footpads, intent on robbing a foreigner, or was there a deeper significance in their cautious attentions?

He walked on. In the distance he could now see lights streaming from the Café of the Holy Ghost; men were seated at a table beneath the stars on the pavement outside. Martin slackened his pace and strained his ears, always careful never to look behind. There was no doubt about it: he was still being followed. What was more,

the number of footsteps behind him had increased. There were now at least four men. His body was drawn tense as he walked along that quiet street, with the stars glittering mistily and the thin tinkle of a guitar coming to him from some unseen patio.

Within a few yards of the café he quickened his pace, and entered the bright restaurant without once glancing at his pursuers.

The Café of the Holy Ghost was a long, low room, overcrowded with tables. Possibly a hundred men were busy drinking and talking. A thick haze of smoke lingered in the air. One end of the room was occupied by an American bar behind a high, zinc-topped counter. Behind this counter an active, white-coated drink-mixer, as dark and Indian-looking as the rest of the company, was shaking a drink.

Biddeford swept the room with his glance. At a table, seated alone with his back to the door, he recognized the broad figure of Sam Ducat. Without a moment's pause, he hurried across the room and stood at Sam's table. Two men had followed close upon his heels, but they did not hear his whisper as, without looking at Ducat, he said under his breath:

"Don't speak to me, Sam. There is going to be trouble. Four or five men have followed me here. Two men are moving up behind me now; the others will probably come in in a minute."

As he spoke, the door of the café opened and two men stepped inside.

CHAPTER XX

It was Sam Ducat's nature to be phlegmatic and unemotional, and he received this speech from Biddeford without so much as the blink of an eyelid.

No further word was uttered between them, and Martin, as though he and Sam were unknown to each other, passed farther along the room and took his seat at an empty table some little distance away. Sam lifted a glass and drank, then rapped the table and ordered another bottle of beer. When the bottle came he kept it before him unopened. Years ago he remembered a remarkably "bad man" in a saloon on Craig in Montreal telling him that there was no weapon on earth to equal a bottle for close fighting.

Sam, smoking a long native cigar, was dressed in a new navy blue suit of which he thought a good deal. The suit had cost sixty dollars in the Calle San Francisco two days earlier, and was a present from Biddeford. Being the largest ready-made suit procurable in the city, it might have been expected to fit, but Sam looked as though he had used a shoehorn to get into it. Across his back were two horizontal lines, where the coat had stretched to fit his shoulders. All the same, Sam was immensely proud of that suit, which was as assertively new as it was miraculously tight.

Half turning in his chair and drawing at his long black weed, Sam surveyed two of the men who had followed

Biddeford. They were both young, both Indian in cast of countenance, with hard-boned faces and narrow eyes. Sam, with his chin thrust forward a little, saw them saunter along behind Biddeford and take a table next to where the Captain had seated himself. There were two chairs there, but one of the men took two further chairs from a vacant table and placed them at his own. The men were now between Sam Ducat and Biddeford, and Biddeford's back was towards them. Sam saw instantly that the Captain intended to continue to play the game of not knowing that he was being watched. He had taken an illustrated paper from a rack on the wall, and, turning over its leaves, appeared to be deeply immersed in the paper. He was, however, far from being immersed in its contents, as Sam knew.

Something was about to occur. A few moments elapsed, and the two men were joined by the two others who had entered last. Biddeford heard the creaking of chairs. The four had strategically planted themselves between him and the door. He began to wonder if he had mishandled the situation. It looked almost as though he had permitted himself to be shepherded into a trap. An irresistible impulse to size up his adversaries overcame him; and moving his chair as though to bring a better light on the paper he was reading, he glanced at the next table. Every one of the four men appeared at that moment to be looking at him. It seemed as though he caught all their eyes at once. Beyond the men, ten feet away, smoking, with the unopened beer-bottle before him, was Sam Ducat in that ridiculous new suit of his. Sam, with his broad shoulders, his broad face, his tough, short beard, looked like an overfilled sack. But

in the fleeting glance Martin had of his face he read alertness and intense anxiety.

Biddeford's drink came, a long American drink with two straws, and a tinkle of ice against the glass. He leaned forward, drew at the two straws for a moment, and allowed his eyes to wander about the room. The white-coated barman was shaking a drink in his mixer with his head on one side. His high, zinc-topped counter was littered with glasses and spoons. There were bottles of many colors and shapes behind him, and at his left hand was a little row of electric switches which illuminated the café.

To the right of the bar, on a small raised platform a foot above the level of the floor, four negro musicians had appeared—a jazz band. And with the musicians was a boy in a silver-embroidered coat, tight maroon breeches and scarlet sash. One of the negroes, a long, gloomy-looking, coal-black fellow, stood up and lifted his voice:

"Patrons," he said, "a song."

The boy began to sing a melancholy Spanish song, and Biddeford, pretending to listen with lowered head, kept watch on the table next to him.

The boy sang a verse, and was applauded. He sang a second verse, and one of the men at the table near Biddeford rose. Saying something about moving nearer, this man passed Biddeford, and purposely tripped against his foot. In a moment the fellow turned, poured out a volume of Spanish, and in mock rage swept Biddeford's drink from the table. Biddeford had been waiting, taut as a bow-string, for something of the sort. He leapt from his chair, and put all his power into a half-arm

jolt that lifted the man from the floor and sent him sprawling six feet away. Martin then dipped his hand into his hip pocket. But he was too late. He turned to find himself looking down the barrels of two blue-black weapons, and the third man was moving steadily to get behind him.

This scene had played itself in the tick of a clock. And there is no doubt that Biddeford's earthly career would have ended in that saloon, in that precise moment, had not Sam Ducat been there. Sam had padded softly, but with lightning swiftness, into the picture. He held the beer-bottle in his hand, and brought it down on the head of the first man who had lifted his pistol at Biddeford. This accomplished, he flung his gorilla-like arms round the second armed man.

For a brief instant Martin was safe.

He leapt back, and simultaneously the door of the café opened and five further men who had been watching the scene from the street rushed in. These fellows, as villainous-looking a set as Biddeford had ever seen, abandoned concealment and came at him at a run. Everybody had risen in the room, and Biddeford could see these men threading their way towards him as swiftly as possible among the impedimenta of chairs and tables.

It was now his turn to act with efficiency. He sprang back, ran along the front of the zinc-topped counter, and with his hand on the switches swept the café into darkness. Someone fired in the darkness. Biddeford could see the little bluish flame with a heart of scarlet. With the crack of the pistol, pandemonium arose; a great stampede was made towards the door, and in the

gloom the white-coated drink-mixer tried to put his hand on the switches to relight the room, but Biddeford, wanting none of that, hit out in the darkness. A satisfactory crash of glass ensued. Spanish blasphemy ascended from the abysmal darkness; the mixer was lying amongst his bottles, cursing copiously. The café became a black inferno of seething tumult. Tables and chairs were overturned, glasses were crushed underfoot; one of the negroes began to yell in English at the top of his voice:

“For God’s sake, light de light—there’ll be murder done! For God’s sake, light dem lights!”

It seemed to Biddeford that the most apposite thing he could do now would be to withdraw from the Café of the Holy Ghost without further dalliance. Therefore, with a shout for Sam to follow, he turned and ran towards the door. Overturned tables and chairs impeded him, and wedged in the doorway itself were a score of customers yelling and fighting to attain the street. Outside in the street itself Biddeford could hear shrill whistles being blown. The police, waving lanterns and whistling like mad, were calling assistance.

“I have got to get out of this,” said Martin to himself. Setting his teeth, he began to fight his way forward. Before him a man fell on his knees, and Biddeford, climbing on his shoulders, hurled himself bodily over the crowd ahead, carrying three or four men with him in his descent.

A moment later he was breathing the free air of the night. His first thought after that was for Sam. Where was Sam? The shot fired in the café had evidently been aimed at himself by one of the men who had

attacked him, but Mexicans he knew to be not so effective with firearms as with something else. He hated knives with a true Anglo-Saxon hatred. And the thought that Sam might have fallen to a knife-blade in that inferno of a café filled him with rage. Men were still struggling in the doorway, shouting and gesticulating like mad.

Biddeford lifted up his voice and yelled:

"Sam, where are you? Sam! Sam! Sam!"

Then from beyond the door of the café he saw a low, squat figure ambling towards him.

"Thank God, Captain!" cried Sam. "I thought they had got you!"

"I thought they'd got you, Sam!" cried Biddeford in fervent relief. "Come," he said, gripping his friend's arm; "we must not mix in; we must run for it."

They crossed the road to the quiet side of the street, and managed to slip away unnoticed by the police. Then they ran until the brawl at the door of the café was nothing but a murmur in the distance. Both then paused for breath.

"How did you get on, Sam?" asked Biddeford.

Sam stepped forward, and beneath the stars of that perfect night mournfully turned his back to Biddeford.

"They busted it, Cap'en, right between the shoulders."

"What?"

"My new coat."

And it was true. His prized new coat was rent right up the back from top to bottom.

Biddeford laughed.

"To-morrow, Sam," he said, "I'll buy you another one, the best you ever had in your life."

"It would ha' lasted for years," said Sam ruefully.

"I suppose," said Biddeford, "that it has not occurred to you that you saved my life?"

Sam plucked at his thick beard. He knew that Biddeford was speaking the truth, but he felt uncomfortable. He would rather let it go at that, and nothing said about it. And Biddeford, understanding his feelings, said no more.

They turned and walked towards Biddeford's hotel.

"Who do you think they were, Cap'en?" Sam asked, after a few moments.

"Friends of Alverado and de Mattos," Biddeford replied.

Sam was silent for some moments; then he said, with the satisfaction of one who has achieved a difficult sum in arithmetic:

"I laid out two and you laid out one, but there must have been nine altogether. That putting out the lights saved us, Cap'en. If it hadn't been for that, we should have been dead meat by now."

CHAPTER XXI

BIDDEFORD rose next morning early. His adventure in the Café of the Holy Ghost the night before struck him as a thrilling, but not personally an unpleasant experience. He was sorry for Sam's devastated coat, but that was a matter easily remedied. He descended to breakfast in an uneasy state of mind, caused by the fact that Edna and her mother had not returned to the Colonel's hotel at the expected hour the night before. He feared that something unpleasant had occurred to them as well as to himself.

And when he reached his table in the hotel dining-room, his particular waiter approached and handed him a letter that had been delivered a few moments earlier by a messenger. The letter was from Colonel Everdale, and briefly invited Biddeford to call at the Francesco Hotel for a conversation on business at his own convenience after breakfast. After that Biddeford made an unusually brief business of his morning meal, and in less than half an hour was being conducted to Colonel Everdale's suite of apartments. The elderly man greeted him with his usual courtesy, and Biddeford judged from his manner that nothing unpleasant had occurred to Edna and her mother the night before.

"I asked you to call, Biddeford, at this unusual hour on Lord Hyde's business. I have received a wire of instructions," began the Colonel, after shaking hands.

He went to the table and took up a few sheets of paper on which he had decoded a long wire of instructions from Biddeford's chief.

Martin accepted a chair at his invitation, but would not smoke. He felt from the Colonel's attitude that the telegram received had conveyed news of importance.

"In the first place," said Everdale, "I ought to tell you that you are ordered to proceed to Tampico immediately."

Martin inclined his head slightly.

"Your information in regard to the operations of the *April Day*," went on the Colonel, "has been of great use to certain persons here, who will find it of service in approaching the Mexican authorities. You follow me, of course? I am referring to the diplomat we saw yesterday."

Martin again inclined his head. He wondered if there were any chance of Edna coming in, or any likelihood of seeing her before he went.

"When am I to leave for Tampico, sir?"

"To-day."

Biddeford sat up straight and made a valiant effort to dispel the roseate dream which had possessed him during the past days. At no time, save only for a brief time at the Café of the Holy Ghost the night before, had Miss Everdale been out of his thoughts.

"I think," said the Colonel, smiling at him pleasantly, "you will have greater scope there. You must have found this place a little boring and a little dull."

"Not at all, sir," protested Biddeford.

"And for that reason," continued the Colonel, "my

wife and I have done what we could to provide amusement for you."

"You have been more than good to me," Biddeford fervently assured him, "but I don't know what it is to be bored."

"You must have found the evenings very dull," said the Colonel kindly.

It was Biddeford's turn to smile.

"Last evening, Colonel," he said, "was one of the liveliest I ever spent in my life."

The Colonel lifted his eyebrows.

"You spent the evening with me."

"Very pleasantly," said Biddeford, "but it was after I left you that the particular liveliness I refer to began!"

He told the Colonel lightly and briefly of his experience at the Café of the Holy Ghost, and how no less than nine men had evinced an interest in his extermination.

Colonel Everdale looked grave.

"I think, in the circumstances, Biddeford," he said, "it is more than ever urgent that you should leave here to-day."

"If I may be permitted," said Martin, standing before him, "I will call to pay my respects to Mrs. Everdale before leaving this afternoon."

"Certainly, certainly," said the Colonel. He paused a moment, then said gravely, with a clouded face: "My wife is not at all well this morning. As a matter of fact, she and my daughter were subjected last night to a most disagreeable experience——" He hesitated and stopped.

"May I ask the nature of the experience, sir?"

"They were," said the Colonel, speaking with an effort, "interrogated by the police."

He would have said more, but an inner door of the room opened as he spoke, and Mrs. Everdale herself came in. She looked pale, and Martin read deep anxiety in her eyes.

She came forward and shook his hand.

"I am so sorry Edna and I missed you last night, Captain."

She looked at the Colonel.

"I have been telling Biddeford why you were late."

Mrs. Everdale put a hand to her brow.

"It was awful," she exclaimed; "did you tell the Captain everything?"

"I was about to tell him everything."

Mrs. Everdale turned again to Biddeford.

"We were taken, Captain, to the American Consulate—very politely, of course, and with every consideration for our feelings, but you can imagine how terrified I was. My daughter was closely interrogated as to her movements of the past three months. I cannot think how it could all have arisen. The American Consul said he had received certain information which obliged him to take this unusual course."

Biddeford's mind instantly jumped to McGuire. Behind the events of last night he saw McGuire's hand as plain as day. And as the Colonel's wife poured out her agitated story, he saw in his mind's eye the chart-house of the *Lachine* and McGuire's narrow face and distorted lips. He saw again the cupidity on the wireless man's face, as he talked of the ten thousand dollars reward for the arrest of Edna Morris. The word

"blood money" floated up into Biddeford's mind again.

And Colonel Everdale, looking at him, felt surprised to see the color fade from beneath his tan, to see his strong chin stiffen and his brows contract. He was not aware of the fury that was sweeping the young man.

"What do you intend to do, Colonel, in regard to this?" Biddeford's quiet words gave no clue to his inner feelings.

"I am consulting the British Minister," answered Everdale. "He is the only one who can help us and perhaps even he cannot avert the course of events——"

He turned towards the door and became silent, for at that moment Edna herself came in. The girl looked from one to another with questioning eyes. There was color in her cheeks, and she held her head high, but Biddeford could see that she too was feeling the strain. Her fingers touched his, and he found them cold. He looked steadily at her for a moment, and a passionate desire to stay and protect her against any impending danger whatever swept through him.

"Is it absolutely necessary, sir, that I leave to-day?" he asked, turning to Edna's father.

"Absolutely," the Colonel returned; "these are our orders."

If Martin could have resisted those orders, he would have done so. And if he could have come upon McGuire at any moment during the hours that followed, a disaster would have happened to McGuire. But as it was, he was obliged shortly to take his leave and return to his hotel to pack in time for the afternoon train.

On the way back to his hotel, he sought his friend Sam, and told him something of what had occurred.

Sam listened, meanwhile growling in his beard language that even Biddeford found reprehensible.

"It's no good swearing, Sam," said Biddeford; "we can do nothing. If it rested in the hands of McGuire, I would let you wring his neck with pleasure. But it doesn't; the American police and the American Vice-Consul are at work, and we can do nothing against them."

"Well, if I can do nothing here," said Sam, "I will come with you to Tampico, Captain."

Biddeford welcomed the suggestion. Then it occurred to him that he had promised to make good the sailor's devastated suit. He invited Sam to come with him to the Calle San Francisco, in search of a new suit. But the Calle San Francisco could provide nothing ready-made for a figure like Sam's. The shopman, however, promised faithfully to provide a fit if given twenty-four hours. Sam looked depressed, but Biddeford told him he had better wait a day for his new suit, and presently the two parted, and Biddeford returned to his hotel to pack.

Having filled his suit-case, purchased in the city, he sent for his bill, and, seating himself on a chair in the hotel window, looked gloomily out on the afternoon blaze of sunshine beyond the window awning. The pull to stay in Mexico City was very strong upon him. When the time came for him to take his departure, he rose languidly, rang the bell for a porter to carry his belongings, and lit a cigar. At that moment a hurried knock smote the door. Optimistically thinking his ring had been answered, he called out, "Come in."

The door opened, and Colonel Everdale stood upon

the threshold. He came in quickly, closing the door behind him.

"Excuse this unceremonious intrusion, Biddeford," he said in a low voice, "but I have an important request to make."

Biddeford gripped his hand, and drew him forward.

"What is it, Colonel?"

"When you get on the train, Biddeford, you will find my daughter Edna there. I want you to take her with you, and to see that nothing happens to her till she reaches Tampico. She will take a boat from there to England."

It was only in that moment that Martin realized how much he had inwardly feared for Miss Everdale's safety. He was swept by a feeling of infinite relief, and gripped Colonel Everdale's hand till the elder man winced. The Colonel read an eager answer in his eyes.

"Thank you, Captain," he said with emotion. "I know nobody to whom I would so happily trust my daughter as yourself."

Biddeford, who was not given to blushing, blushed.

"How did you come to decide to send her back to England, sir?"

"After you left," said the Colonel, "I sought advice of the British Minister." Biddeford nodded his understanding. "But I was met by the information that if the Americans issue, as they intend to issue, a provisional extradition warrant against my daughter, nothing whatever can be done to avert this most humiliating occurrence."

Martin inclined his head. "I fully understand you, sir," he said feelingly.

"I was told," continued the Colonel, "that her only chance is in flight. At Tampico a passage can be arranged for her, and once at sea in a British vessel——"

Biddeford spoke up quickly.

"Then, Colonel, there is a real hurry; it's a race between us and the provisional extradition warrant?"

"Exactly," said Everdale, "and neither her mother nor I will breathe freely until she is safely at sea. You saw my poor wife's state of distress"—there was a sudden note of entreaty in his voice—"and I am sure you will do all in your power for her sake."

Martin assured him on this point.

"I am afraid," the elder man continued, "though she is too good a wife ever to utter a word against me, Mrs. Everdale feels that I was foolish ever to allow my daughter to associate herself with Lord Hyde's schemes. But Edna was high-spirited," he went on in a tone of extenuation, "and—and——"

"You could not resist her, sir," Biddeford put in.

The Colonel inclined his head.

"Perhaps you will some day understand how I came to submit. If you ever have a daughter, a very charming only daughter, Biddeford, you will find it not easy to refuse her requests, however outrageous." A charming and deprecatory smile played over his fine features. "But all this is boring you——"

"No, no," Biddeford hastened to assure him. "I regard the safety of Miss Everdale as a sacred trust."

"Thank you, thank you; I am relying on you," the Colonel said, looking into the young man's face. "The happiness of us all is in your keeping."

Two minutes later he was gone.

CHAPTER XXII

THAT evening Biddeford arrived early at the depot, and took seats in the Pullman for Miss Everdale and himself. But the train was on the very point of departure when Miss Everdale, accompanied by her father, hurried on to the platform and climbed lightly into the big saloon car. The Colonel, soldierly, erect, showing no trace of his earlier emotion, stood on the platform waving his hand airily as the train drew out. Miss Everdale's expression, however, was one of deep gravity.

Biddeford knew that she must be feeling the separation under such unpleasant and anxious circumstances. He had secured her a good place next to the window, and, respecting her mood, made no effort to talk. He seated himself opposite her, and tried to engage his thoughts with a picture magazine. But it was not easy to fix his attention, and soon he laid down the magazine and turned to the window and to the scenery beyond. Miss Everdale was wearing a neat traveling costume and a neat little hat that reminded him of the blue hat and the deep, obscuring veil she wore on coming aboard the *Lachine*.

The train had been traveling for half an hour when the girl broke the silence.

"Do you think, Captain, I shall get a boat at Tampico?" she inquired in a low voice. There were other persons in the car, but not within easy earshot.

Biddeford detached himself from his apparent absorption in the scenery.

"It's almost certain, Miss Everdale. I gather that strings are being pulled by telegraph already."

"I suppose you know," said Edna, still in a low voice, "that the Americans are extremely efficient in—in matters of this sort?"

"I do know it," said Biddeford; "and if there is no British boat leaving at once, it would be unsafe to stay at an hotel. Had your father thought of that?"

"Oh, yes; that has been arranged already." Edna unfastened a little handbag, took out a letter, and opened it. "I am going to stay," she said, with a smile and an approach to her usual level of spirits, "at a place outside Tampico, with an old school friend of mine, Carmelita Maria Obegoza Escadrillon."

"Plenty of names," said Biddeford.

Edna nodded, and put back the letter.

"Carmelita was at school with me," she said. "My mother wired her to-day, and she wired back that she would be mad to have me. She is married to an important Spanish personage, and is a delightful creature—romantic and intensely Spanish. Her husband is head of one of the most exclusive families in Mexico, vastly wealthy. Their estate is a dozen miles or so, I believe, out of Tampico itself. I shall be safe there, even if I have to wait for some days."

Biddeford felt more than a little relieved at this piece of news, and after that the hours passed all too swiftly for him. He was enjoying his first long experience in Miss Everdale's company since those tense days aboard the *Lachine*. And as the train wound its way through luxurious tropical scenery down mountain after mountain, he became absolutely and definitely convinced of

one thing; and that one thing was the desirability of the company, not for a day, but for always, of the charming girl who sat before him. It seemed incredible to him, as the train slipped through the rich, sun-bathed land, that there could be any shadow upon the future of Edna Everdale. He began to weave dreams.

Then his natural instinct to overcome circumstance rose to his aid. He and Edna must pit their wits against the cunning of McGuire and the skill of her American pursuers. It was a comfort to Biddeford to think he was not alone in this. The power of the British Minister was also unofficially, of course, working for Miss Everdale's safety. At present no charge had been made against her. She was therefore entitled, assuming her ability to do so, to take the earliest possible ship from Mexico. "The chances," he thought, "are more than even."

At Tampico, in the architecturally ornate depot of the Central Railway Company, Biddeford anxiously scanned the station platform for the presence of any inimical persons. Seeing no one likely to rouse his suspicions, he led Edna from the car on to the platform, and suddenly a man stood at his elbow. The man was of distinctly English appearance, with a clean-shaven, glum, horsy-looking face, a neat black alpaca suit, and a large straw hat. The stranger's eyes were fixed, not upon Biddeford, but upon Edna.

"I beg your pardon, miss," he said in homely Cockney English that had a pleasant ring in Biddeford's ear, "but are you Miss Everdale?"

The man bent and took up Edna's suit-case.

"I am the Señorita Escadrillon's coachman, miss. Will you kindly come this way?"

He led the way to the station entrance, and here a lightly built covered carriage, drawn by two glossy and magnificent horses, with a groom standing at the animals' heads, awaited them.

Biddeford, who had followed closely on the coachman's heels, saw that all was as it should be, and held out his hand to his traveling companion.

"I will say good-by here, Miss Everdale. Any message you wish to send will find me at the British Vice-Consul's." His fingers touched hers. Edna turned and smiled at him.

"Oh, good-by, Captain, good-by, and thanks, thanks. My mother will be awfully grateful to you." She added this with a slight touch of raillery, but he was quite certain that her fingers lingered in his. And there was something in her gaze, a dependence upon him, that filled him with a sudden sense of exhilaration.

In the meantime, Edna had turned towards the Escadrillons' fragile-looking carriage. A little cry of delight greeted her from within; she felt herself drawn forward and rapturously kissed on each cheek. And in the gloom she could see her friend of six or eight years ago, now Carmelita Escadrillon, and a great lady. Carmelita possessed the same creamily olive skin, the same lustrous and sentimental eyes, and the same definitely marked brows as of yore. But she had filled out, and had become, at twenty-five, an imposing and stately Spanish matron.

"Oh, Edna," she cried in a voluble rush of English, "I am so delighted to see you, and you look so beautiful!

I had no idea you had grown so lovely. Do you think I have grown old?"

"No, no," Edna protested.

"Do you remember when we fought?" demanded the Señora Escadrillon. She laughed delightedly. "You hit me with a hair-brush."

Edna remembered.

"When I got your wire saying you would come and stay with me I was wild with joy," outpoured the lady. "You will like our house, and my husband. He is in the Government, you know—a tremendous personage. Do you remember how I was always saying that I wanted to marry a rich man, but that it was essential that I should love him?"

"Yes," laughed Edna, trying to gather her wits in this cascade of chatter. "And do you love him, Carmelita?"

"I adore him," gushed the Spanish lady. "But he is grave, and older than me a little, of course."

She leant forward and took both Edna's hands in her own, looking into her friend's eyes.

"Edna, forgive me for talking so much. I have been all bottled up. Now tell me all about yourself, why you are in Mexico, how long you can stay with me, what you are doing, and"—she quizzically scrutinized Edna with her head slightly on one side, her soft red lips pursed—"and who was the handsome stranger at the depot?"

"What stranger?"

"The tall, dark-haired man with the audacious blue eyes."

"Oh," said Edna, "that was a Captain Biddeford. He is a friend of my father's."

Carmelita opened her eyes wide, scenting romance,

and romance to her was the very joy and essence of life. She foresaw exquisite confidences between herself and Edna.

After two hours' drive along a fine road running parallel with the shore, the carriage turned into a small park, thickly grown with palm-trees and tropical shrubs. Señor Escadrillon's horses wheeled smartly, came to a smart halt, and the groom sprang to their heads. The English coachman, Edna being a fellow-countrywoman, descended from his seat, and went so far as to carry her suit-case into the patio. The Escadrillons' house was a large, white-washed, unimposing and secretive-looking residence, with no visible windows upon the outside.

But if the exterior of Carmelita's house was unimposing, the interior proved magnificent. In the cool, marble-paved patio a fountain played; there were boxes of carved marble laden with brilliant flowers; a gallery with an ornately carved wood balustrade overlooked the fountain and the stone-flagged patio below. From this gallery a peon man-servant appeared and took Edna's suit-case from the coachman.

The room allotted to the visitor was at the back of the dwelling, and from a long, narrow window set high in the wall Edna obtained, through palm-branches, a glimpse of the ocean. The Escadrillons' garden ran to the very edge of the shore. On the sands were dressing-rooms and a pavilion for the purpose of surf bathing.

"Now I shall tear myself away from you for a few minutes," said Carmelita, kissing her friend on both cheeks. "You are tired, Edna, and you shall rest till supper. Afterwards we will have a long talk."

She passed out of the room, a stately and magnificent creature, kissing her finger-tips as she went.

At supper, some hours later, Edna made the acquaintance of Carmelita's husband, and found him a grave-looking man of forty or forty-five, wearing side-whiskers, which gave him a Victorian appearance.

The girl enjoyed the long-drawn, ceremonious meal. When the party returned to the large salon for coffee, Carmelita suggested to Edna a walk to the shore, the air there, she said, being delicious. Edna knew that her friend was dying for that long *tête-à-tête* talk, and immediately agreed, going to her room to put on an evening wrap. Carmelita drew a white Andalusian shawl about her shoulders, and the moment the door-curtains had dropped behind Edna, turned to her husband.

"Luis, is my friend not charming?" she exclaimed.

Don Luis admitted Edna's quite unusual charm.

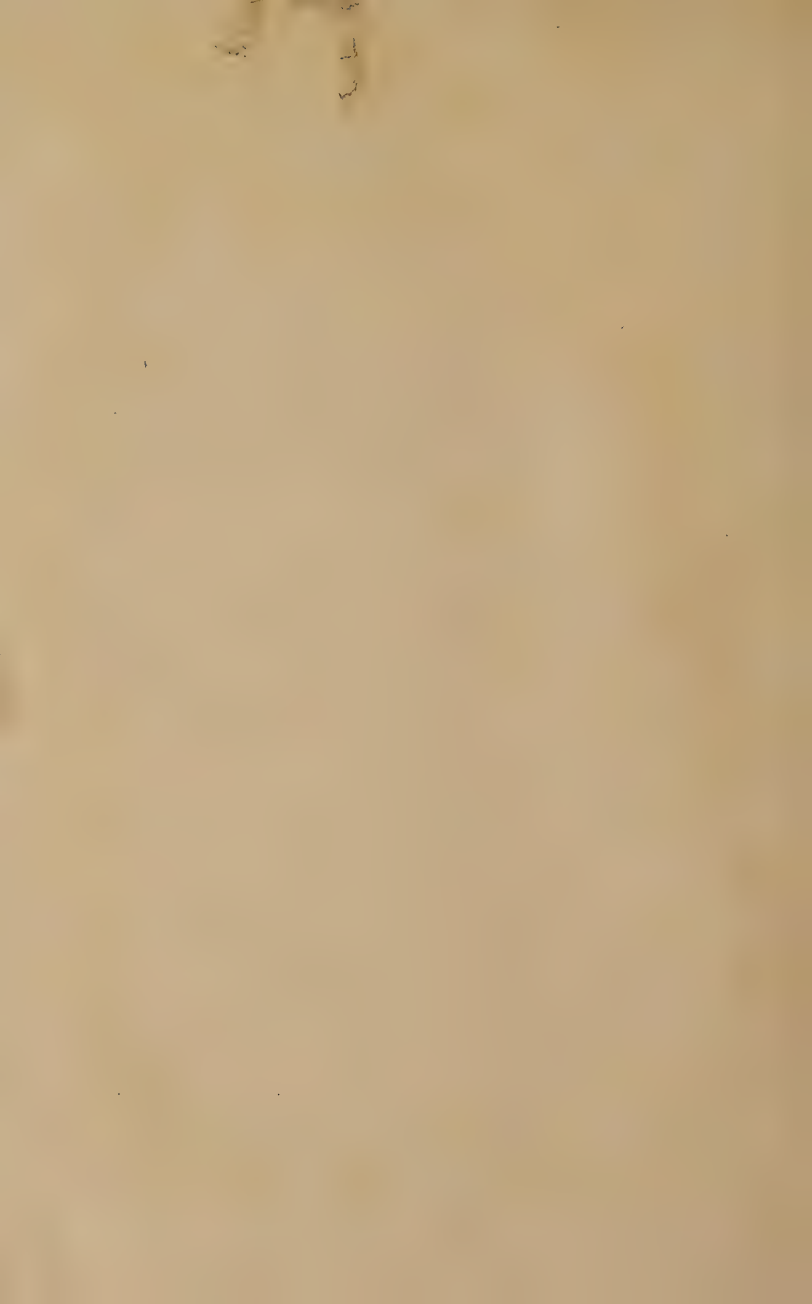
"And so lovely, Luis?"

Don Luis again assented. Then, being a Spaniard of bluest blood, added gallantly:

"But, Carmelita mine, where the sun shines, the moon must always be pale." Having paid this compliment, he turned his head in quick surprise. For the curtains which served in place of a door had been drawn aside, and a man suddenly presented himself in the aperture. The intruder was a total stranger to Señor Escadrillon and his wife. He was a handsome dark-skinned man of thirty, wearing a short ooze-leather jacket trimmed elaborately with silver galloon. His tight trousers were of grey army cloth, his necktie was scarlet, his *chap-parallos* (leggings) were of soft doe-skin. In his hand, as he stood silently surveying the room from the threshold,



The character of the passers-by was different from the European appearance of the multitude in the Paseo de la Reforma.



he swung a costly, tall, wide-brimmed hat, trimmed elaborately with silver. A formidable pistol-holder decorated his left thigh.

"A thousand pardons, señor."

Señor Escadrillon strode towards him.

"You are a sergeant of the Rurales?"

"Yes, señor."

The stranger was, in fact, a member of this famous body of soldier police, who have earned a reputation for courage and discipline second only to that of the Royal North-West Mounted Police of Canada.

"Señor, I beg a thousand pardons for this abrupt intrusion," said the man.

Don Luis received this apology with cold reserve. He was a personage of consideration, and the Rurale's uncereemonious entrance was not at all to his liking.

"Your business?" he demanded briefly. Meanwhile Carmelita stood in a distant doorway, erect and magnificent in poise, in her white Andalusian shawl.

The handsome Rurale crossed the room with a clink of spurs. He handed a paper gravely to Señor Escadrillon; then stood quietly waiting, watching with an expressionless face the blood pale from Don Luis' cheeks.

"The English Señor Everdale!" he ejaculated. "You are here to apprehend her?" His eyes again sought the paper. "The charge is——"

"Murder, Don Luis," answered the young man formally.

Don Luis, utterly bewildered and in consternation, turned his eyes to his wife. But his wife had disappeared. As a matter of fact, the volatile and romantic Carmelita Maria Obegoza Escadrillon was vastly quicker in the uptake than her stolid husband. She had seen in

a flash that danger threatened her friend, and no sooner had the word left the officer's lips than she slipped from the room, sped to Edna's chamber, and delivered the news.

"Oh, Our Lady protect you!" she panted, pouring out the news, her back against Edna's closed door, her eyes shining like stars. "It is too terrible; it is too terrible!"

Edna, white as death, but full of fight, went to her, gripped her shoulders.

"Carmelita," she whispered, in passionate urgency, "you must help me. It is all a mad mistake on the part of the police, but I would rather die than be taken. Lock the door. I must send a note to Captain Biddeford."

She turned, ripped a page out of a notebook, penciled a few desperate lines to Biddeford, and then handed them to her friend for immediate despatch.

"Now," she whispered, "tell me how I can get out of here—quick, quick, quick!"

At that moment footsteps and a jingle of spurs sounded in the corridor outside; a ringing knock smote the door.

CHAPTER XXIII

MARTIN BIDDEFORD was enjoying the amiable company of the British Vice-Consul at Tampico. Something cool in a glass stood before him, a good cigar was between his lips, and a good conversationalist occupied the chair at the other side of the table.

The two had talked of tarpon-fishing, the Vice-Consul being a wonder at this particular sport. And Biddeford, who had already heard of his skill, paid due deference to a man who had once caught in Tampico Bay, with rod and line, a mighty fish, seven feet two inches long. From the subject of tarpon the two drifted into other channels of amiable intercourse, and a pleasant hour or so glided away, until the sun began to throw long black shadows in the street.

Then Biddeford put on his hat and sauntered out for a view of the *April Day*, which had arrived in the channel two days earlier. The evening was perfect. The perfection of the temperature and the rich golden tropical glow filled Biddeford with awe. The ships in the little harbor were transformed into vessels of fairyland, and wherever a ship's skylight or bit of glass caught the vast glowing orb, an arresting golden blaze, like a miniature sun, filled the eye.

Biddeford had proceeded a little way along the road, when Sam Ducat, who had been waiting in a café, sauntered forth and joined him. Sam, true to his word, had

followed from Tampico that day, and was wearing his new suit of white drill, which seemed actually almost large enough for his immense girth and beam.

"A fine evening, Sam."

"Aye, Cap'en; they are used to fine evenings here."

He fell into step at Biddeford's side, and the two proceeded towards the harbor.

"I want to have a look at the *April Day* through the glasses, Sam," said the Captain.

A few minutes later they reached the edge of the quay, and looked out over the evening water. The smooth ocean was now blood-red and gold. In that transfiguring glow even the old *April Day* looked romantic. Biddeford, with Sam at his side, focussed his glasses and scrutinized Alverado's vessel with close interest. She had been lying there two days, and there had naturally been never a word as to her call at Rojo for the unloading of her mysterious cargo. After watching her for a few moments, Martin turned to Sam.

"The Vice-Consul's right," he said. "Alverado and most of his gang are away." Then his attention became focussed on a man who had emerged from the *April Day's* chart-house.

"I wonder what the next move is going to be, Sam?"

"He pretends he's here looking for a cargo. The Port Authorities say what sort of cargo, and he says oil. Now, what would he want oil for, Captain?"

"He might ship a cargo of oil," Biddeford answered thoughtfully, "to hide some other business: he's deep enough for anything; but we happen to know what his real game is."

"Revolution," put in Sam.

"Yes, and a fortune for himself."

All this time Biddeford had been watching a figure on the *April Day's* deck. This figure had now climbed to the top of the chart-house.

"Sam," said Biddeford, handing the sailor his glasses, "what do you make of that fellow messing about on the chart-house?"

"Ah!" exclaimed Biddeford, instantly enlightened, "that's it! That's where McGuire will come in. They are fixing up a wireless set."

He took the glasses again, and saw that the man on the chart-house roof was now throwing a wire to another man, who had climbed half up the vessel's mast. The men were busy stringing up a wireless aerial. The conviction also came to Biddeford as he watched that the *April Day* was intended to play a large part in Alverado's future doings. So far as his own business went with Alverado, he decided to wait in Tampico and watch until the big man's return. His sole business in Mexico was to secure the concession for Lord Hyde. How he was to accomplish this he did not know. But he felt that at any moment a chance might arise. After watching the *April Day* for half an hour, he took Sam to his hotel, intending that the two should dine together. As the Captain entered the patio, a hotel servant casually informed him that a letter awaited him in the rack. It had come after Biddeford went out, and had been lying there all day.

Biddeford took the letter eagerly, hoping to find a letter from Edna. But the envelope, to his disappointment, was addressed by Carmelita Escadrillon, whose hand, of course, was unknown to him. He tore it open and read Edna's brief penciled note.

For some moments after that he remained rigid; then suddenly turned on the hotel servant.

"Get a car—the best you can," he commanded.

"When does the señor want it?"

"Now, you fool, this minute!" He turned to Sam, who was staring at him with startled eyes.

"Anything wrong, Cap'en?"

"Yes, something's happened to Miss Everdale. I want you to come with me."

For a moment Sam Ducat hesitated.

"What about watching the *April Day*, Cap'en?"

"Get a car, Sam—for God's sake, get a car! In the meantime I'll ring up the Vice-Consul and ask him to set a man to watch while we are away."

Fifteen minutes later Biddeford, with Sam at his side, was speeding northward in a hired car. Biddeford himself was driving. Edna's letter had come upon him with the staggering effect of a blow between the eyes, and unjustly he now began to curse his own lack of perspicuity. While he had been amiably dallying with the Vice-Consul and watching for Alverado, the efficient American police system had been drawing a net about the girl who meant everything in the world to him. As the car sped along the well-made road, he blamed himself for having left her a single moment alone. He told himself that he had undertaken her safety as a sacred charge, and had failed.

And yet what better plan could have been adopted than that she should stay with the Escadrillons, thus avoiding the publicity of an hotel, until a boat could have been found for her? He leaned forward in the

seat of the car, gripping the wheel with brows drawn and tense face.

Edna and he, it became plain to him now, must have been followed from the very moment of leaving Mexico City. And McGuire was in this. At the back of it all lay the machination of that contemptible—— He could not think of any word low enough to designate the depth of McGuire's iniquity.

"Sam," he said through his teeth, breaking a long silence, "if the fates let me see McGuire to-night, he'll run up against something hard. He deserves no mercy, and he'll get none from me. Do you hear, Sam?"

"Aye, Cap'en."

The car seemed to be crawling. It seemed hours since he had dashed out of the hotel and leapt into his seat beside Sam, waving a twenty-dollar note at the driver and pushing him to the sidewalk. And what was the good of it all—of all this frantic haste? The thing was accomplished. That which had been so much a terror to the old Colonel and his wife had been accomplished. Disaster had occurred. It was too late. If he met McGuire, if only the fates would let him meet that unthinkable, yellow-skinned miscreant, just once, for five minutes! He startled Sam by suddenly shooting forth his fist in the air and uttering McGuire's name. He felt Sam's hand soothingly on his arm, and with a growl turned his attention to the road. Daylight was fading. The gold had left the heavens and the sea. Upon his right he could see the waters of the ocean, now grey and dead, showing through interstices of feathery palms. The palms rose softly black against a sulphur-colored sky.

Save a few strings of laden donkeys, they had passed

no traffic whatever since leaving Tampico. Now, however, in the distance, Biddeford suddenly saw two horsemen move from the side to the middle of the road. Both men were magnificently mounted; each wore a tall felt hat with a cart-wheel brim trimmed with a decoration of silver thread. Their coats were equally decorated, and each man carried a carbine slung across his knees.

"Who are these, Cap'en?"

"I don't know," Biddeford answered, looking at the men, who were now strategically blocking the road. They were both smartly uniformed, dignified, disciplined-looking fellows. The elder man, who wore a greying chin beard and was strongly Indian in type, demanded where they were going.

Biddeford slowed down.

"We are driving to the villa of the Don Luis Escadrillon."

The man nodded.

"Your name, señor."

Biddeford gave his name.

"You are a friend of the Don Luis?" the man asked again.

"Yes," said Biddeford; "who are you?"

"I am a police officer," said the Rurale; then, to Biddeford's surprise, he rode nearer, and, leaning dexterously from his horse, opened the door of the car and examined its interior. Having assured himself that Biddeford and Sam were the sole occupants, he waved his hand.

"Pardon, señor," he said; "you may go."

Then, with a second sharp look at Biddeford and Sam, he backed his horse dexterously away. They were free to advance.

"What's all this mean, Sam?" asked Biddeford.

"It might happen to mean, Captain, that them Rurales didn't get Miss Everdale after all, and they are looking for her."

"My God, Sam, do you think that's possible?"

"From what I've heard you say of the young lady, I should think it was likely," said Sam judicially.

Ten minutes later the car, without further investigation, reached the house of the Escadrillons, and Biddeford was immediately escorted into the presence of Edna's friend, Carmelita.

Carmelita Escadrillon, wearing a black dress, and with her ebon hair arranged in the Spanish fashion, looked very handsome and Southern. She received Biddeford with outstretched hand.

"You are Captain Biddeford, the friend of Edna?"

Biddeford nodded, and explained that he had received Edna's note only half an hour earlier.

The lady glanced about the room.

"We are quite alone, Captain; will you be good enough to be seated? This news must have been a great shock to you."

"It was," Biddeford said, "and for Colonel and Mrs. Everdale it is a tragedy. Miss Everdale was entrusted to my charge," he added, a bitter note in his voice.

Carmelita looked at him with a peculiar expression in her eyes.

"In your charge," she said. "Yes, of course, I understand." She suddenly lowered her voice. "We can talk here; there is no one to overhear."

He was wondering what occasion there might be for secrecy, when Señor Escadrillon leaned towards him.

"Then you have not guessed?" she whispered.

"Guessed what?"

"That Edna escaped. The Rurales did not take her. They still look for her. Our house is surrounded; you doubtless met some of them on the road; at all our doors there are guards."

In his excitement Biddeford had risen.

"Escaped, señora?" he breathed; "then she is safe. Thank God for that!"

"Perhaps not quite safe yet, señor, but I pray Our Lady she may soon be so."

She paused. "Edna is magnificently brave, is she not?"

"Where is she?" demanded Biddeford, heeding nothing, knowing nothing, save that for the time being Edna had eluded her pursuers.

"Señora, would you," said Biddeford quietly, but with intense firmness, "be so kind as to tell me instantly where Miss Everdale is?"

The Señorita Escadrillon, incurably romantic, assumed a dramatic and majestic air that maddened him. The event of the previous night had been the one stirring episode that had occurred to her since her marriage, and now in retrospect she was enjoying it anew.

"Señor Biddeford," she said, "the Rurales came upon us like a thunderclap."

"You have already told me that, señora."

"But listen. I took the news to Edna in her room, and she wrote you that letter, and even as she wrote a Rurale came to the door and knocked, peremptorily summoning her to descend."

The Señora Escadrillon lifted her hand and looked at him, with her fine eyes open wide in admiration.

"Ah! what courage she has, Señor Biddeford! She asked me, 'Will that door lock, Carmelita?'"

"'Yes,' I told her, breathless and shaking with fear.

"'Then lock it.'

"'I obeyed, and she came close to me, very white, but calm——'"

"'Yes, yes?'" broke in Biddeford.

"'These men shall never get me, Carmelita; I would rather die first,' she said. Then," went on Carmelita, "I took courage from her, señor. I told her that below her window was a ledge, from which she could reach a balcony, and could from there descend easily into our garden. But we both knew that the garden was not safe. It would most certainly be watched the moment she was missed from the house. Then an idea came to me, señor. I recollected the boathouse of our nearest neighbor, which is some distance from here along the sand. Our neighbor has built out a stone jetty, and upon this a pavilion with a little harbor of its own, and boats beneath. A charming place indeed to secure the coolness of the evening. I thought of this deserted pavilion, señor, and that our neighbor's house is closed. It was a forlorn hope, but Edna seized the chance at once, and with great courage climbed from her window. That was last night at this hour, señor, and the fact that the Rurales are still watching shows that she has not been found. But I am in dread that any moment she may be discovered. And oh! I have been praying all day that you might come. What do you suggest, señor?"

"Where is Miss Everdale now?"

"In the pavilion, of course, señor?"

"How far is the pavilion from here?" inquired Biddeford, endeavoring to sort his thoughts.

"An English mile, in the direction of Tampico. You will see it easily; it stands quite alone in the sea; even at low tide it is surrounded by water."

Biddeford fell into thought. From what the Señora Escadrillon had said, it was plain to him that it would be the veriest madness to visit the pavilion by daylight. He would be almost certain to be seen and followed. And if the Rurales were as vigilant as he imagined, then it would be unsafe to cross the sands at night-time also, for even by starlight his figure crossing the featureless space would be discernible.

"It's an awkward situation, señora," he said at length. "Her place of hiding makes it difficult for me to get to her without discovery."

"Yes; I have already realized that, and for that reason I have been unable to send her food. As long as we are being watched it is impossible that anything can be sent to her from us."

Biddeford was silent again for a few moments, and a plan formed in his mind. If he could not approach Edna from the shore, he might be able to reach the pavilion by sea, making his approach to it at the darkest part of the night. He gave no details of this plan which suddenly took shape in his mind to Carmelita Escadrillon, but merely said to her at parting a few minutes later:

"Señora, I think I have a plan to get to Miss Everdale;" then he smiled and held out his hand. "She is in my charge, remember."

"Yes, yes, I understand," Carmelita answered sympa-

thetically. "She is so lovely and so brave, I am sure you will save her, señor."

When Martin reached his car he found Sam Ducat in absorbed conversation with the Escadrillons' English coachman. The man turned and stood before Biddeford.

"Excuse me, sir," the man said; "if I can be of any assistance to you in any way whatever in regard to Miss Everdale"—he paused and looked vaguely about the palm-grown garden—"in regard to any matter, in fact—I shall be only too pleased, sir."

"Thank you," said Biddeford, looking at the man's pallid, long-jawed, horsy face. There was almost a wistful note in the coachman's voice which appealed to him.

"Thank you. If you can help us in any way, I shall not fail to call upon you. By the way, what is your name?"

"John Miller, sir. It's a real treat to me, sir, to hear a British voice. I've been talking here to Ducat like one o'clock. The pay here's good, and that's the only reason I stay, but it's a God-forsaken 'ole when I think of old London."

"You are a London man?"

"Yes, sir."

"I expect you do find a difference," said Biddeford, gripping Miller's hand and hurrying away. He had never seen a clearer case of homesickness, of nostalgia for the fog, rain, the greasy streets, and the voice of London's traffic, in his life.

"Good-by, Miller; many thanks. I shall not forget your offer," he said, waving his hand as the car glided away.

CHAPTER XXIV

To be marooned on a tropical island in romantic circumstances was an experience Edna Everdale had longed for in a hundred childish dreams. The tropical island of her dreams had been bathed in sunshine, and deep blue water had gently lapped a coral shore. Palms fringed the beach, bananas, yams, and every pleasant edible kind of fruit grew conveniently near at hand.

Those childish dreams were recalled to her mind now, when in cold and actual fact, at the age of twenty-four, she found herself genuinely marooned. Alas! not on a delectable island, but in a deserted apartment built over the tropical waters of the Gulf of Mexico. For twenty-four hours she had been a prisoner in the empty pavilion. In her ears boomed the thunder of the never-ending waves, and the great rollers passed beneath her lonely place of concealment, breaking on the beach fifty yards away.

The boat pavilion was a costly structure, imported in its entirety from New York. Edna found in its interior every possible comfort, save only the comfort of a human voice, and the probably more necessary comfort of something to eat. The mile of sand and tropically verdured coast across which she had sped in darkness to reach her hiding-place had seemed to her a never-ending journey. And a score of times, as she ran, she had believed herself

hotly pursued. Carmelita Escadrillon, however, had cleverly delayed pursuit by instituting an elaborate search of the house. During the search Carmelita herself conducted the Rurales into every corner of the residence.

The hours in Edna's place of hiding crept on leaden feet. How long she would have to stay there she did not know. But the night had been intolerable in its long darkness; a weary day had passed, and it was night again. The incessant riding of the great waves below her, the never-ending boom of the surf, became a maddening irritation to her nerves.

Moreover, she was acutely and savagely hungry. If a meal had been placed before her and suddenly snatched away again, it is quite likely that she would have struck the person who had dared to perform this piece of cruelty. In the hours of her incarceration she grew to hate the elaborately and beautifully furnished little pavilion. So long as daylight lasted she had attempted to read, having found English books in a well-furnished bookshelf. She had raked out boxes of indoor games from a cupboard, and, alternately with reading, she had played solitaire.

She was a prisoner in an untended prison, and at any moment her pursuers might take it into their heads to make a search of this isolated building. It seemed strange to her that there had been no sign from Captain Biddeford, for she naturally believed he had received her letter nearly twenty-four hours ago. But when the second night came on, she spent hours with her face at the window, looking out upon the endless expanse of sand and sea, over which darkness, it seemed to her, would never fall. For no sooner had day faded than the stars came out and

the moon rose—a white, torrid-looking moon whose light, streaming in upon her face, seemed actually to burn the flesh. There was something uncanny in the stark whiteness of the tropical moonlight. It filled the pavilion with a strange and ghostly atmosphere of light and darkness. Not often in her life had she been afraid, but she began to experience fear now. And as yet no escape was possible, for in that mysterious white moonlight her figure on the sand could have been detected a mile away.

The desire came to her to weep, and she relapsed back into a luxurious, many-cushioned divan, covering her face with her hands. She tried to sleep, but her nerves were completely unstrung, and a sensation that she heard soft approaching footsteps kept sleep away, or startled her into wakefulness the moment she dozed. And then there was that insufferable hunger. Through all the terrors of possible capture, her mind continuously and unromantically dwelt on food.

For hours she had watched the dazzle of moonlight fleck with sharp brightness one after another the costly Persian rugs on the floor. She had watched in a sort of mesmeric stupor, and at last must have dozed, for she suddenly found herself wide awake and thrilling with terror in complete darkness. The moonlight had gone, and someone was cautiously groping at the pavilion door! Her heart gave a leap, then seemed to drop like a stone. She rose, pressing her hands to her brows, and heard the door-handle turn. The door creaked beneath the weight of a shoulder. Then silence reigned—a long, portentous silence.

“Miss Everdale, are you there?” A low voice, which she

knew and which sent wild elation through her, reached her ears.

She put out her hands towards the door, made a few steps forward, then amazingly fell with a crash.

Utter darkness rose up and enveloped her.

CHAPTER XXV

"I WAS a fool to come in like that; I frightened you."

Edna could feel an arm about her, could feel herself gently lifted and laid on the ornate cushioned divan.

Her faculties began to clear.

"No," she answered; "it must have been the lack of food. I've had nothing to eat since I came here. She sat up and came unsteadily to her feet, her hands resting on Biddeford's arm for support.

"You had locked yourself in, and I could not do anything to the door, but I managed to open one of the windows with my knife."

The girl passed a hand over her brows.

"It's very good of you to come like this. How did you do it? There was moonlight till a little while ago. I thought it was those Mexican Rurales, and my nerves had got a little jumpy. This roar of the surf is abominable, and then—I was hungry. Have you brought anything I can eat?"

"The fools didn't give me your letter when it came, or I would have been here last night. You shall have all you want to eat in a minute. Now sit down again." He slipped his arm through hers and led her back to the much-cushioned sofa.

He had drawn away the curtains at two of the windows, but even now no light entered. The moment she was seated Biddeford left her. She heard the tinkle of glass and the rustle of paper.

"Drink this."

She drank and felt revived, and began to eat.

"I have brought enough food to last you till you get out of this, anyway," Biddeford said. "I had to wait hours till it was dark enough to come. As things are, I am afraid we dare not strike a light."

"You came across the sand?" Edna asked.

"No; I dared not risk that with so many of the Rurales watching the district, so Sam and I waited till the moon went down, and came here from Tampico by boat. Miss Everdale, I mean to get you safely out of this," he continued, in a voice that had grown deep and full of purpose. "A British boat is leaving Tampico the day after to-morrow, and I can fix you a passage without too much publicity. In a month from now you will be safely back in England."

Edna's hand moved towards his in the darkness. For a moment he enclosed it in his own big palm. The hand slid away from his touch.

"I am so grateful to you," she murmured softly—"I am so grateful to you, Captain, for coming."

"Miss Everdale," said Biddeford earnestly, "do you think you have the courage to stay here a little while longer, a few hours? Neither the British Minister nor the Vice-Consul at Tampico can do much on your behalf; the situation is a delicate one, and if you came along with me now you would be discovered, without a doubt."

Edna was silent for some moments; then lifted her face, which he could not see.

"How long must I stay, Captain?"

"Until dark to-morrow at latest. I shall then have fixed up a passage for you, and you can slip away from here and go straight aboard."

She pondered this for some minutes; then said that she would gladly follow any plan he might make for her.

"I dare not leave Tampico for long at a time," Biddeford explained, "as our friend Alverado has begun to take in a cargo of petroleum, which looks as if he intended to move soon. Anyway, he is shipping it, and a wireless, a five hundred kilowatt Marconi ship set, has been fixed up on the *April Day*. The crew is aboard, but at present there is no sign of Alverado himself. A good many people are on the lookout for him. We have roused up the Mexican Government authorities, and if Alverado slips through their fingers and manages to get aboard he will have to do it pretty cleverly. In the meantime, you can guess I am pretty well occupied watching his vessel. The theory of the Mexican authorities is that he has shipped oil as a blind.

"Anyway, they are assured that he intends to join General Escabodo. My own idea as to his whereabouts is that he is lurking somewhere inland, and may make a dash for the *April Day* at any hour. I am expecting big things to happen, Miss Everdale."

He rose, and she heard him laugh in the darkness.

"If I don't go," he said, "it will be daylight soon, and anyone who is watching this place may see me. I could not do a worse service to you than that. But to-morrow night," he said, putting out his hand and finding hers again in the darkness, "I shall be here again." Her hand in his was quite cold.

"You are not afraid, are you?"

"Captain," she entreated, "can't I get away now"—her fingers tightened over his for a moment—"if you could take me with you?"

"That would be a mad thing to do, Miss Everdale. I would like it better than anything in the world, but we should be seen when we returned the boat to its owner; we should be almost certainly seen on the water as soon as dawn came. No," he added after a moment's further consideration, "that way would be madness."

The impulse swept through Edna to implore him to alter his decision. But she saw reason in what he said, and knew that his duty lay, not with her, but with greater issues. She told herself also that the fear and dread which haunted her was a thing of her imagination. She was safer in her isolated place than she could possibly be elsewhere until her passage was arranged.

When Biddeford at length bade her farewell, she went to the gallery which ran round the pavilion and stood at the seaward door peering into the cloaking darkness. A cool breeze blew upon her cheeks. A last appeal to him to take her leapt to her lips, but was forced back again unuttered. The strong will that had stood her in good stead in crises in the past came again to her aid, and a few moments later she heard Biddeford's footfalls descending the wooden stairs to the beach. She could see him for a moment as an accentuation of the darkness; then night swallowed him.

For long after that she stood at the open door looking seaward, listening with all her ears. But only the monotonous crashing roar of the surf came to her. From a deep violet the sky began to turn faintly golden. She went into the pavilion, and closed and locked the door behind her.

CHAPTER XXVI

TWENTY-FOUR hours after Biddeford's departure from the Escadrillons' house, John Miller, the English coachman, was summoned hurriedly into his mistress's salon.

"You wish to see me, señora?"

"Yes, John," Carmelita answered in English. "Please follow me."

She led him to a private apartment, which was more than half chapel, in which she was in the habit of praying in moments of difficulty. Religious pictures and copies of old masters hung upon the wall; a large crucifix and a *prie-Dieu* occupied a corner.

Señorita Escadrillon, with a grave and portentous air, closed the door.

"Miller," she said, holding a letter in her hand, "I have received this letter from Señor Biddeford. It refers to the English Señorita Everdale. The Señor Biddeford has a good opinion of you, Miller."

"Thank you, señora," said the coachman, his eyes lighting with pleasure.

"He is prepared to entrust you with a task of delicacy and danger; you would like that, Miller?"

"Yes, señora."

For a moment Carmelita was silent, regarding him contemplatively; then she said:

"If I trust you with this delicate task, you will give me your word that nothing of what shall pass will leave

your lips? You will be silent always and keep my confidence?"

"Yes, señora," answered Miller. He looked frankly back into his mistress's eyes.

"I shall surprise you," said Señora Escadrillon, "in a moment by confiding to you, Miller, that the Rurales that were here yesterday were searching for Miss Everdale."

"So I understand, señora," said the coachman with British calmness. "The servants all know it, señora."

Carmelita frowned.

"There is always too much talk in Mexico; is it not so, Miller?"

A faint smile flickered over the coachman's countenance, but he said nothing.

Carmelita moved towards him, and said in a still lower voice:

"The Señorita Everdale is not guilty of the charge that is brought against her. But she is in great danger, Miller, and to-night her safety will be in your hands. You are to go to the place I shall tell you of, and lead the Señorita Everdale to my carriage, which you must have waiting in some secluded part of the road. The Rurales who have been watching us have been withdrawn; but you will then drive fast until you are met by a motor-car, in which you will find Captain Biddeford and his friend, Mr. Ducat. You will stop for no one but the Señor Biddeford and his friend. Do you understand?"

Miller repeated her instructions aloud. "I am to drive towards Tampico as fast as I can go, until Captain Biddeford meets me. I am to stop for no one but him."

"Yes, yes, exactly. You will go now and make ready the carriage. Before you leave I shall give you a note for

my friend Señorita Everdale, and I will tell you where she is to be found."

John turned towards the door, and his mistress immediately moved after him and laid a hand on his arm.

"You will remember, Miller," she said, looking earnestly up into his face, "the Señorita Everdale is in danger; her safety will rest entirely in your hands. The Captain Biddeford trusts you. I can trust you too, Miller?"

John Miller's lips set in a tight, hard line.

"Yes, señora," he said grimly.

CHAPTER XXVII

"WILL you step up, miss, please?"

"I can see nothing, Miller."

"No, miss. I'll light the lamp in a minute and pull out into the road; the horses have been waiting a long time, and they are a bit impatient."

Edna, who had been escorted across the sands and on to the road from her hiding-place, groped her way forward, and at last climbed to the driver's seat of an English phaeton, drawn by two of Señor Escadrillon's superb horses. Miller struck a match, lit the carriage lamps, ascended to her side, took up the reins, and clicked his tongue.

"Your baggage is on behind, miss. I thought you would rather be up here beside me; you'd feel safer, like."

"Thank you, Miller; it is very kind of you to take so much trouble."

"No, miss, it's a pleasure," Miller answered heartily. He pulled out into the road, and immediately put Don Luis' fine pair into a smart trot.

For some minutes Edna remained silent; then she said:

"Have you heard anything of Captain Biddeford, Miller?"

"Nothing, miss, except that he could not come earlier, owing to important business, but he will meet you on the road."

Edna wondered if the important business was the return of Alverado, and a sharp sting of pain ran through her heart at the thought of danger touching Martin Biddeford.

To cheer herself and to dispel a growing feeling of depression, she turned to John Miller and began to talk, drawing him out about his life in Mexico.

He told her that he had taken up the work hoping to save enough to set himself up in business in a livery stable at home. But it had not been so easy to save money as he had expected. And he longed for London with that curious, pathetic, and ceaseless longing of Londoners, who, like himself, dwell in some of the most beautiful places in the world.

"How was the West End looking when you came away, miss?" he asked.

Edna described the appearance of the new motor-buses, the approximate number of motor-cars to horse-drawn vehicles, the new traffic regulations in the Mall.

"I expect there's been a lot of changes since my time. It's a pity about the horses going, miss; the Park about twelve o'clock used to be a sight. A rare sight, miss. I suppose you will be there again, miss, in about five weeks' time?"

"About that, Miller, I think."

Miller swept his skilful whip in a little circle, causing the lash to sweep within a few inches of his off animal's ear. They sped along in silence. The note of the horses' hoofs, a perfect rhythmical beat, rang pleasantly in Edna's ears, dissipating the still emptiness of the road. Her eyes had been all the time fixed steadily ahead, hoping for the sudden gleam of Martin's head-lights through

the darkness. She knew that he would come the moment he was able to do so. But when they had driven for an hour there were still no signs of Biddeford's approaching car. The fine coast road spread before them—a pallid, great white band with foliated darkness and mystery upon either side.

Suddenly Edna heard a stir at the side of the road, and a horseman, who had been entirely invisible beneath heavy foliage until that moment, swung out behind them. Edna's heart stopped beating. Was she caught after all? Was this one of the Rurales? The man, managing his horse with exceptional skill, cantered to the side of the carriage, rose in his stirrups, and turned his face towards Edna. She could see his features—a dark young man in a high-crowned hat who was totally unknown to her.

For a moment in the diffused light from the carriage lamps she could see his eyes steadily regarding her. John Miller, instantly alert, swung his whip.

"Get out there!" he called. The man turned his head, and, without a glance at Miller, swung his horse round and trotted back the way he had come. The whole incident occupied scarcely a minute, and Edna found her heart throbbing with a sensation of impending, unknown danger.

"What do you think the man wanted, John?"

But John, with all his knowledge of that district, was as perplexed as his companion. He shook his head. Edna noticed, however, that thereafter he worked the horses into a greater speed, and that once or twice, when he believed himself unnoticed, he glanced back over his shoulder. For some time a silence lay between them;

then at last a muttered "Damn!" escaped Miller's lips. He leaned forward, clicking his tongue rapidly, sending a professional quiver along the reins.

"Juan! Paulo!" he called to his horses, and then urgently, in English: "Git on, good boy!"

Edna felt a swift responsive quickening of speed; the horses plunged into a gallop.

"Hold tight," said John through his teeth; "we'll have to go it for all we're worth."

"Why, Miller?"

"They are after us."

She turned her head, and saw what Miller's experienced ear had already detected, three black figures on the road behind them. Dimly and far in the distance, and like dark shadows, these horsemen were pursuing them. Evidently the silent rider who had scrutinized Edna's face had reported to others, and this pursuit was the result.

Miller's whip cracked in the night air. The two superb horses, in best light English harness, were stretching themselves finely, and at every move Miller's encouraging British words titillated their ears.

"Juan, Juan, good boy! Git on, Paulo!"

Edna, clinging on the swinging seat, tightened her lips; his driving was magnificent.

"You are not afraid, miss?"

"No." But she was as white as death, fearing she knew not what. And ahead on the long, straight road there was no sign of Biddeford.

"Look out for the Captain's lights, miss; we may see them any minute," Miller encouraged her. "It will be all right. I will look after you, miss; you are in my

hands, see? These horses——” He leaned forward, his urgent voice speeding them: “Juan! Paulo, Paulo!”

For the next fifteen minutes Edna was conscious only of flying treetops, of the crack of the whip, Miller’s compelling voice, the tinkle of harness, and the beat of hoofs. The pace was terrific. No man in Mexico could have got more out of Escadrillon’s magnificent pair of horses than John Miller got through the first fifteen minutes of that race. But all the chances were against them. And behind, first as a faint tintinnabulation and later as a heavy drumming, rising louder and louder in power, Edna heard the three horsemen. Glancing over her shoulder, she could see them now, long-stirrured centaur-like men, bending, coming on with heads down, pulling over them, hand over hand. Miller, too, began to glance over his shoulder.

“I see no light ahead yet, miss.”

“Nor I, Miller. Oh, I pray God they come soon! who are these men, do you think?”

“I don’t know, miss, but they mean no good.”

He turned. Not five yards behind the carriage a horseman who had outstripped his fellows was pressing forward.

“Get back!” shouted Miller, flourishing his whip.

The horseman paid no heed, but continued to press forward until his animal was shoulder to shoulder with Miller’s team. He shot out a hand, leaned over and seized the near horse by the bridle. Miller’s whip spun out and lashed his face.

The man winced, muttered an oath, and swung his carbine.

“Halt!” he shouted in Spanish.

On the far side of the carriage a second man had ridden up and seized a rein. The carriage slowed, and Miller realized that the game was up.

Within two minutes, in a lather of perspiration and trembling from head to foot, the fine team was at a standstill. John Miller's face, very white, was working. The man he had lashed was the horseman who had first observed them and then ridden away.

"Get down," commanded this fellow, with a threatening move of his carbine, and a hand on his cheek where Miller's lash had stung his flesh.

Neither Miller nor Edna made any effort to descend.

"Get down," commanded the horseman again. The rays of the carriage-lamp defined his face for a moment. In his eyes Edna glimpsed a hard, scowling darkness, and in his voice a ring that filled her with swift terror. She put out a hand to stay Miller from any action which would further anger the sinister figure. But Miller was a man of courage. He believed he saw a chance of escape, and instantly took it. With a lightning sweep of his whip, he delivered the man a second cut across the face; then turned to his horses, calling in wild urgency:

"Paulo! Paulo! Juan! get on!"

The animals, always responsive to his lightest touch, plunged forward. A cry leapt into Edna's throat and died there. The man with the carbine backed his horse and lifted his weapon. Then, without further word, fired point-blank at Miller. Edna saw the flash and the man's diabolical face lit up for a moment.

The reins slipped from Miller's fingers.

"Run, miss," he gasped. "away—the trees; they

can't——" Then, with a sudden shivering attempt to rise, a futile clutch at the dash-board, he toppled forward and fell heavily to the road.

Hardly had Miller reached the ground than the man who had fired the shot swung himself from his saddle and was in the seat beside her. A powerful arm slipped round her waist.

"You will remain still, señorita," said a low voice in her ear. The carriage had begun to move forward again, and the man, with his free hand, had gathered up the reins. John Miller was lying still in the road. Edna turned.

"Please pull up and let me down," she commanded.

But the man turned and grinned at her. "Not yet, Señorita Everdale," he said in halting English.

"I demand to know who you are, and where you are taking me."

The dark face, with the mark of Miller's whip-lash scarred across it, turned towards her.

"We are taking you to Don Sebastian Alverado."

Edna's eyes widened.

"Señor Alverado? But what does the Señor Alverado want with me?"

"You will learn that from the Don Sebastian himself," said the man. "Our orders were to watch for you and take you to him."

"And to murder anyone who dared to impede you?" said Edna with spirit.

"The man was a fool. Why did he strike me?"

After that he fell into silence, and turned his attention to the winded horses, now moving forward at a slow trot along the grey, starlit road. On either side dark

and impenetrable trees rose against the purple sky. The road, stretching far ahead in a straight line, was empty. No sign of Biddeford's head-lights shone as a beacon of hope to Edna. She was being driven she knew not where, or to what end. For what could Alverado want of her, and how had he known of her presence in Tampico at all? She tried to cajole her captors into talk, but, possibly acting under orders, all three men refused to be drawn. Two, indeed, after the first few moments dropped behind with the third man's riderless horse. In this way the cavalcade proceeded, until a cleft in the trees in the left revealed a short road to the ocean. Edna could see the beach, ghostly in the starlight, and could hear the surf booming. She saw also at the right of this little by-path, off the main road, two houses with lights gleaming from the open doors. There appeared to be much activity in both these buildings, men coming and going.

"You will descend here, señorita," said the man at the reins. He stopped the carriage and himself climbed down. A man approached out of the darkness, received a word of instruction from Edna's captors, and, removing the girl's suit-case from the back of the phaeton, moved away.

"Come this way, señorita." The man who had shot John Miller was speaking. He made no effort to prevent her escape, but she knew that many eyes were upon her in the light diffused by the carriage-lamps and the rays issuing from the open door of the low bamboo houses. Edna followed him to the door of the nearest house, and was ushered into a small, lamplit, bare room, furnished with a table, two chairs, and nothing else.

The door of a large inner room was ajar. A crowd of men were there, and somehow the thought of this brought comfort to the girl's mind. Her guide left her in the small empty apartment and passed into the room. No attempt whatever appeared to be made to detain her.

She caught glimpses through the half-open door of preoccupied, voluble men in the room beyond. Presently a tall figure appeared among them moving towards her; the door opened wide, and Sebastian Alverado presented himself. He was wearing a dark alpaca suit; his expression was one of preoccupation, but as his eyes fell upon Edna, a cold, cynical smile parted his lips.

"Señorita, a thousand welcomes!" he said with ironical politeness. Then he looked her full in the face. "You are a little surprised to see me so soon, eh?"

"I had no thought of seeing you," retorted Edna, steadying her voice; "and if you have a spark of humanity in your being, Señor Alverado, you will send someone to the aid of Señor Escadrillon's coachman, who is lying in the road, having been shot down and left to die by one of your men."

Alverado dismissed the request with an impatient hand.

"Miss Everdale," he said quietly, in his perfect English, "there are serious matters between you and me, far more serious than an accident to a coachman."

"In what way serious?"

"You have been dogging my footsteps for many weeks, señorita. You troubled yourself to follow me back again to Mexico. The *April Day*, my vessel, comes to Tampico, and immediately I find you here, always industriously watching my doings. This is very excellent service on your part, señorita, for the persons who employ you, but

I can assure you and those persons that in following me to Mexico they risked too much."

Edna looked at him in amazement. It seemed impossible that he believed she had followed him to Mexico, and again to Tampico. He knew nothing of the real cause of her presence in Tampico, or of her flight from the Escadrillons' house. His own spies probably believed the activity of the Rurales to be on their account. She hesitated for a moment, then said:

"My visit here, señor, has nothing at all to do with you. I am on my way to England, and intend to leave by a ship sailing to-morrow. Surely that fact should prove that I have no intention of watching you, or have any interest whatever in your movements."

She looked steadily into his face, but she was inwardly trembling, and thinking with terror of Biddeford's chances if he ran into this hornet's nest of enemies. Alverado's face was hard as iron. He bowed his profound contempt for any protestation she might make. Then he suddenly strode towards her, laid a hand on her shoulder, and with suppressed ferocity looked down into her face. The strength of his grip prevented her from moving.

"Be good enough to let me go," Edna commanded.

He tightened his grip on her shoulder until the pressure was painful, but behind the force of his personality she could read nervousness. Other things were in his mind, things which gave him intense uneasiness, and which caused his eyes to move restlessly.

"There are times, señorita," he said, "when it is safe to walk into the lion's cage, and there are times when

such an adventure is extremely dangerous. You have, unfortunately, stumbled on one of those occasions."

"Will you kindly let me go?" she said, retaining her dignity. "I have told you I am sailing from Tampico first thing in the morning."

He removed his hand from her shoulder and stood back looking at her for fully a minute. Then he said slowly and triumphantly:

"You are sailing to-night, Miss Everdale!"

An electric shock sped through her; she knew that her cheeks flamed into color and became deadly pale; she could feel the blood flowing and ebbing almost painfully.

"To-night?"

"You will sail to-night with me," went on Alverado calmly. "You will be safer with me than roaming loose, meddling in political affairs which should be left solely in the hands of men."

His meaning flooded over Edna's being, swamping her senses for a moment; then a wild impulse to fly seized her.

"Your belongings are already on their way to the *April Day*," he continued. "I myself intend to embark at once."

Edna heard his laugh as she turned and fled on wings of terror into the darkness outside. A sharp, brisk order penetrated her senses. Two men who had been waiting beyond the door rose as if by magic from the earth. A Mexican blanket was swung in the air and drawn down over Edna's head. She felt herself struggling madly for breath. Her feet left the ground, the hateful boom of surf assailed her ears. . . .

CHAPTER XXVIII

BIDDEFORD leaned forward and looked at the speedometer.

"We are making forty miles an hour, Sam," he said in a tone of satisfaction. "We ought to be seeing the carriage soon now."

"Aye, aye," said Sam.

The two had been delayed in Tampico by news that much activity had suddenly come into being aboard the *April Day*. As a result of this, Biddeford had been obliged to interview the Governor of the town, who had instantly issued a warrant for Alverado's arrest, and had placed an armed guard at the docks to await his coming. The charge against him was to be one of sedition.

The road lay empty, and no sign of the Señor Escadrillon's fine equipage rewarded Martin's intent gaze. Where was she? The question grew in importance as the minutes passed.

"Perhaps she's been delayed, Cap'en?"

"Perhaps." But he was not satisfied. It was possible that the Rurales had discovered her after all.

As the distance from Tampico increased, Biddeford's fears mounted with it. They struck the long, straight stretch of white road, passed the place where the phaeton with Edna had turned down the narrow road leading to the sea, and the house where she had had her interview with Alverado. For a few minutes after that the car hummed along in silence, and suddenly the deep, vibrant note of a ship's siren droned on the night air.

"God!" exclaimed Sam, gripping Martin's arm in his excitement, "that's the *April Day's* siren!"

Biddeford, too, recognized the *April Day's* note.

"Sam," he said gravely, "that means she has slipped out of Tampico after all, and is making off."

"But what's she calling for, Cap'en?"

The deep "hoot-hoot," echoing in the hills, stirring birds in the darkness of the forest, continued insistently. Sam's excitement caught Biddeford. He sat up tense, listening with all his ears. "Hoot, hoot, hoot"—a rhythmic call. Biddeford lifted his head, turned his face seaward, then tapped his knee with a dot-and-dash rhythm. He was following the call of the siren, and presently he put a hand on Sam's shoulder.

"They are talking! Do you get it? English; it's a message in the Morse, Sam!" He continued to tap, recording the pulsations as he went.

Presently he repeated the message aloud:

"Come aboard, pursued, urgent, Jacobo. Come aboard, come aboard——"

Twice Biddeford read this call aloud as the mighty notes rent the silence of the night. Then he turned again to his companion.

"Sam," he exclaimed, "the *April Day* is away, away at sea, and they are calling for Alverado."

"Then you think he ain't aboard yet, Captain?"

"Jacobo wouldn't waste his time calling for anybody else. He has got wind that the police are waiting for him, and is making a run for it."

The thought suddenly flashed through his mind: What if Alverado was lurking somewhere near them at that moment? Such a thing was possible. It was a clever

ruse of his to join his ship in this way, if it was a ruse. The possibility of meeting Alverado came into his mind, and occasioned a rush of stirring thought. Then his thoughts went back to Edna. They had come more than half the journey, and there was no sign of her. For some minutes after that he applied himself solely to getting the most out of the car, but no sign of carriage-lamps glowed in the road ahead.

"Sam, things seem to look bad," Biddeford confessed at length in a low voice. "If Miss Everdale started at all, we ought to have met her by now."

Sam agreed gloomily; then exclaimed in a startled voice:

"What's that, Cap'en?"

"What?" questioned Biddeford.

"There's something there in the road," said the short sailor.

Martin put on the brake, and brought the car to a grinding halt, only just in time. For in the blaze of the head-lights, a still, dust-covered figure lay huddled in the road, almost under their wheels.

Both men leaped down. Sam reached the still figure, put his arm round it, and lifted the man's face. There was a dark splash upon the white dust of the road, and the man's countenance looked bloodless in the gleam of the head-lights.

"My God!" exclaimed Biddeford in a voice of horror, "it's the Escadrillon coachman!"

"By the look of it," Sam murmured, "he's been shot through the lungs."

"I've got a flask," said Biddeford, and a moment later was pouring a drink between the man's lips.

Miller's head sagged forward the moment it was released, but Sam's arms were strong about him supporting him, and Martin, with a sense of infinite relief, saw the coachman's eyelids flicker.

"What has happened?" he asked in a low voice. "Can you speak?"

The man stirred feebly.

"For God's sake, Sam, as soon as he can speak, ask him what's happened to Miss Everdale."

Then he sprang up and ran a little way down the road, animated by a deadly fear. Here was the coachman, but there was no sign of the carriage, nor of Edna.

There was no sign of anything in the road to reward his search, and in a state of intense agitation he ran back again to Sam and the wounded man. He realized now that something cataclysmic and awful had happened—but what?

Miller, terribly enfeebled by loss of blood, was making a brave effort to lift his head to speak.

"They have gone that way, sir," he whispered. He nodded towards the Tampico road. "They won't hurt her; they would never hurt her, sir." His head sagged a little. "I am sorry. I——"

He ceased speaking, and his head hung forward again.

"Put him in the car, Sam." Biddeford said, and, despite his terror for Edna, a lump rose in his throat.

A few minutes later the wounded coachman, as comfortable as they could make him on the floor of the car, was being carried back towards Tampico. He had lost consciousness when Sam and Biddeford at last reached Tampico, and found a doctor who would take him in.

Biddeford, beside himself, waited till the surgeon

pronounced that he would live; then with Sam again set out to look for Edna. It was dawn by the time they reached the place where the coachman had been found.

There had been no sign of Edna between the place of finding Miller and Tampico itself. She had vanished as though into the skies. Finally, however, by close scrutiny of the road, Biddeford tracked the carriage to the place where it had halted. Here in an empty shed the two came upon the carriage itself, and the Escadrillons' fine horses. The family of poor peons who occupied the house Edna had been taken to the night before said that the carriage had been left there empty. They were obviously a shifty family, either bribed by Alverado to know nothing, or were partisans of his. While Biddeford was questioning them, Sam Ducat discovered footsteps in the sand, and the signs of a heavy boat having been launched at that spot a few hours earlier. From this evidence he was reluctantly obliged to admit to himself that the worst had happened, that Edna had fallen into the hands of Alverado, and had been carried off at that spot.

Alverado, he guessed, was making north, and there was no knowing where he would next go ashore; the whole of Western Mexico was at his disposal.

After pacing the sands in a state of intense agitation and despair for a couple of hours, Biddeford returned to Tampico, and, despite the unpropitious hour, roused up the British Vice-Consul. It was still not five o'clock in the morning, but the Consul was a man of large sympathy, and took in the situation after a very few words of explanation. He agreed that there was every possibility of Biddeford's surmise being the right one.

"There's nothing in our harbor that can do anything over nine knots. I wish to God there was. The ships here, even if you took a liner, could not get under way in time to catch the *April Day*. There's a motor-boat that does thirty knots belonging to a Señor Flores, the President of the Pecan Fruit Company, but I doubt if she's in harbor. Her owner's been away tarpon-fishing, and I believe she is up the bay somewhere. Of course, she may be in, and if she was——"

"Where's her berth?" Biddeford demanded breathlessly.

The Vice-Consul told him, and stared as Biddeford said, "I'll try that," and dashed incontinently out of his house.

Twenty minutes later, as the sun rimmed the horizon, Biddeford, with Sam Ducat hard at his heels, got his first sight of the President of the Pecan Fruit Company's superb little craft.

He and Sam walked to the edge of the dock and looked down on her. There was a gay red-and-white linen awning spread over her, and, to Biddeford's surprise and delight, her Mexican engineer was busy aboard, moving hither and thither putting things to rights for a voyage.

Biddeford hailed him.

There were few people about, and the man looked up and presently climbed ashore.

"Is this Señor Flores' boat?" asked Biddeford.

"Yes, señor."

"Where is Señor Flores?"

"He won't be here for a couple of hours, señor. We

are going out into the bay; we leave at seven," answered the man civilly.

Biddeford looked steadily into the engineer's face, and then turned to Sam.

"Two hours," he said; "that's too long for us. But, Sam, if we could get this boat now, I believe we could catch the *April Day*."

What he intended to do if he caught the *April Day* he did not know. He was prepared to leave the matter to fate and the inspiration of the moment. What he did know was that he meant to make a fight for Edna's safety, even if it cost him his life.

He turned to Señor Flores' engineer.

"What would Señor Flores hire his boat for?"

"He would never hire it, señor; he is rich."

"I am rich, too," said Biddeford, drawing on his imagination.

"He would never hire it," persisted the man.

"I would pay his own price."

The man looked suspicious, began to grow stubborn, and moved towards the launch.

It wanted two hours to seven o'clock until Señor Flores himself appeared; it was impossible to wait that time. Biddeford's professional eye, going over the little craft, assessed her speed at possibly thirty knots.

"Sam," he said at length, coming out of a reverie, "I am going to have this boat—now."

The engineer was already back again in the well of the gay little craft. Biddeford and Sam descended the steps after him.

"It's not allowed for you to come aboard," said the

man in a firm tone, as Biddeford put a foot on the gunwale.

"Get away," said Sam in English. He stepped behind Martin and dropped into the boat. The engineer was a faithful servant, and in a moment was busy making futile attempts to get him out again.

"Now, Captain, if you'll take the wheel," said Ducat.

"We must get him ashore," Biddeford answered, and without a moment's hesitation gripped the mooring rope and whipped it from its stanchion.

Sam put his long arms about the man's waist.

"I'm sorry," he said, "but you've got to go ashore; this gentleman wants your boat."

The man, kicking in Sam's grip, was lifted on to the steps. Seeing that he was helpless against these two resolute men, the engineer ran up the steps and began to halloo for help.

Biddeford, at the wheel of his master's craft, called up at him:

"You won't suffer for this. But it's a matter of life or death."

A moment later a fine flurry of water occurred at the stern of the boat; like a hound unleashed, she leapt through the smooth water of the harbor.

The last they saw of the engineer was his figure running landward gesticulating and calling for help at the top of his voice.

"We've done it now," said Biddeford, over his shoulder.

Within a few minutes he had the hang of the engine, and the little boat was winding her way out of the

harbor, cutting up a high wash of water against her sharp nose.

By now the sun had lifted from the sea, and was ascending gloriously into the morning sky, a vast blood-red ball.

CHAPTER XXIX

DURING the hours that followed one thing alone dominated Martin's mind—the fact that Edna was a captive aboard the *April Day* and in the hands of Alverado.

Where the *April Day* was going, and what was in Alverado's mind as to the future, Biddeford could only surmise. But he knew enough of his enemy to understand that he would be bound to conduct his revolutionary activities from some safe and not easily surprised place of hiding. Where among the illimitable forests, mountains, and canyons of Mexico was he likely to go?

"Sam," said Biddeford through his teeth, in a tone of passionate earnestness, "we must catch the *April Day*."

"Aye, Cap'en," answered the unvoluble Sam, as though the matter happened to be the safest of foregone conclusions.

Martin again turned his attention to the engine, and admiration awoke anew in him at the perfection of the pecan merchant's craft. He told himself that the difficulties ahead were enormous, and that Sam did not realize them. They were searching the vast Mexican Gulf for a ten-knot vessel with many hours' start; a needle in a haystack was nothing to it. And there was Sam taking the matter as already accomplished.

Sam, unconscious of his companion's thoughts, set himself to work and explored every inch of the little craft. And presently he made the announcement that

there was petrol enough for a run of at least two hundred miles. This announcement cheered Biddeford somewhat. They could make thirty knots against the *April Day's* ten.

Sam also discovered lockers containing assorted bottles of wine, and a locker containing spotless white linen. He also discovered a folding iron table with clamps for fastening down a tablecloth, a luxurious little cabinet stocked with spirits and cordials, and another of cut glass. He found in a satin-wood cabinet tea and native preserves, and in another cigars—half a dozen boxes of large Havanas. His search of the boat occupied him for nearly an hour, and at every move his opinion of the wealth and luxurious existence of the pecan merchant ascended. If Sam Ducat had died and gone to heaven, he could not have found appointments superior to those he found aboard the *Porfirio* at that moment.

He began to wonder what the pecan merchant would think and what he would do. His confidence in Biddeford, however, was sufficient to obliterate all doubts. Nevertheless, he was sorry for the pecan merchant, and as he stretched himself beneath the gaily striped awning, upon a ribbed orange-silk cushion, his eyes wandered to Biddeford. The younger man was deep in thought, and save for an occasional swing of the wheel never moved a muscle. His dark head, sheltered by the awning, was hatless. Sam could see by the droop of his shoulders that dejection was upon him, and that he was full of doubts and fears. He decided to do all he could to rouse him, and, moving to his side, asked:

"What course are you making, Cap'en?"

"I am laying a course north-north-east."

Sam glimpsed Biddeford's profile, and noticed the

stern set of the young man's features. He felt that it was up to him to ameliorate conditions as much as he could, and presently he said, tugging with a doubtful air at his thick beard:

"This pecan merchant's got some fine cigars in a locker there, Cap'en."

"Help yourself to one," Biddeford said tersely, without turning his head, and with no emotion in his voice.

Two minutes later Sam was sending aloft a cloud of smoke from the finest Havana he had ever consumed in his life.

He moved up to Biddeford and put a cigar in his fingers, then struck a match, and, sheltering it with his hand, waited till Martin began to draw. Martin found as much comfort in that cigar as in any one he had ever smoked. But he never took his eyes from the glittering sea ahead—the glittering sea, and the sky, with the mighty sun, that had turned from blood-red to a blazing, eye-smiting gold.

The sharp nose of the *Porfirio* cleft the yellow waters like a knife. And on either side a wall of water rose, a solid golden yellow wall, brightly tintured with greens, blues, and other colors indescribable. Biddeford's mind had been busy with calculations from the moment he left Tampico Docks. He judged that he was making a good twenty-five knots. The *April Day* in the unknown distance was making nine or ten. Far off, on the rim of the ocean to starboard, Sam, an hour after starting, saw a big liner making for Tampico. This vessel was the sole craft which had appeared until then on the surface of the ocean. Then, at ten o'clock,

another craft appeared, miles ahead again on the star-board quarter.

"Give me the glass, Sam"; and still with his hand on the wheel Martin manœuvred the *Porfirio* to bring the distant craft into perfect articulation. All he saw was a grimy British collier making for Tampico.

After that, till four o'clock in the afternoon, the little boat raced north-north by east on an empty ocean. Then Biddeford suddenly jerked his head and looked down at the preposterous Sam, reclining elegantly on yellow satin cushions, busy with his third Havana.

"There's a craft ahead, Sam."

"What's that?"

Sam snatched up the glasses and applied them to his eyes.

"Damn you, Sam, hurry!" Biddeford urged through his teeth.

"There's no need to hurry," proclaimed Sam slowly and deliberately. "I know'd her before I lifted the glass. She's the *April Day*."

Biddeford, who had already instinctively altered his course, took the glasses and said quietly:

"How far ahead do you make her?"

Sam glanced at the sky, the sea, the distant boat.

"I put it at fifteen knots, Cap'en. She is going all she can," said Sam.

"Let her go," said Biddeford through his teeth. "In an hour from now we shall be under her counter!"

CHAPTER XXX

IT was late afternoon, and Alverado, José de Mattos, and Captain Jacobo, were seated in the saloon of the *April Day*. There were glasses, ice, and a sumptuous-looking bottle before them. The bottle, gilt-topped, reposed at a jaunty angle in a silver bucket, filled almost to the top with chipped ice. Captain Jacobo put forth his hand, withdrew the bottle from its cooling bath, and poured champagne into a glass. He filled three glasses, pushing one towards de Mattos, one to Alverado, and took one himself. Then, turning politely in Alverado's direction, he rose.

"Señor, your health!" He and de Mattos drank.

"The health of the New Republic!" announced Alverado, lifting his glass without rising.

"The New Republic!" echoed his followers.

There was a light, easy confidence in Alverado's manner as he swallowed his wine, took up a large cigar, and began to smoke again. He had attired himself in a white silk suit, cool, negligent, and easy. The New Republic which Escabodo and some thousand of others were attempting to create, to conjure into being from certain fastnesses in Southern Mexico, did not oppress him. And he leaned back in his chair watching de Mattos, the top of whose hairless skull still bore the hallmark laid upon it by Biddeford weeks earlier.

"José," he said, reaching for the bottle and pouring himself out a further glass of wine, "here's health and

better fortune to you next time." Over the top of his glass he looked mockingly into José's fat, shaven face. "Next time, José," he sneered, "make no mistake; take fifteen men with you when you attack our friend Biddeford. Nine are evidently far too few!"

José de Mattos stirred in his chair; his eyes grew hard.

"It was a mere matter of ill fortune," he retorted. "Biddeford was not alone in the Café of the Holy Ghost; there were others with him."

"One other," Alverado reminded him—"a sailor armed with a beer-bottle." He suddenly turned his head and gathered Jacobo into the conversation. "Captain," he said, "you have made a thorough search of the *April Day* from end to end?"

Jacobo, seeing the point of the joke, grinned and said: "From end to end, señor."

"I feared, perhaps," said Alverado, puffing out a volume of smoke, "our friend Captain Biddeford might be again hiding aboard. That would be dangerous for José!"

"He is not aboard," said Jacobo.

"That is well," said Alverado, still sharpening his wits on de Mattos; "otherwise the Englishman may give him another rap on the head. I fear another rap like the last——"

De Mattos swung in his swivel chair and rose.

"I will listen to no more, señor," he said in a blaze.

He strode towards the door.

"Come! Come!" soothed Alverado, lifting the champagne-bottle and filling the bald man's glass.

"Come, José; to-day let us enjoy ourselves. Work will

begin in earnest when we go ashore. Think of your future, José—a portfolio in a new Cabinet!” He was appealing to José’s vanity, a safe card to play in Mattos’ case. For a few moments the fat man hesitated, then came sullenly back to the table. Alverado drank his health, then continued:

“José, when you and I are in power, one of our first cares will be to improve the Mexican Navy. Our escape is a scandalous reflection on its efficiency.”

“That is true,” put in Captain Jacobo, “of the warships at Tampico, but at Vera Cruz there are——”

Alverado turned and looked at him in his cold, hard manner.

“There is nothing,” he checked him, “in our navy that can outspeed the *April Day*. You yourself have said that, captain.”

“The *Diaz* at Vera Cruz is said to do fourteen knots, señor,” persisted Captain Jacobo.

“The *Diaz* will never find us, captain; nothing will find us. In two days we shall be with Escabodo. We shall be safe; the new régime will be established. Our success, captain, is due solely to my astuteness; my foresight in taking aboard a cargo of oil at Tampico kept the authorities guessing for several days. ‘What harm can a vessel do,’ said they, ‘which is lying in harbor quietly sucking up some hundreds of gallons of oil every half-hour?’” He laughed. “That was a great move, captain!”

“True,” conceded Jacobo; “that was a move of genius, señor. All the same, the expense was great, and we are loaded with a cargo which is to us of no value.”

“We carry other things besides oil,” Alverado reminded

him; "and so far as money is concerned, a little one way or another—what matters it?"

Jacobo, who had grown depressed rather than hilarious during the conversation, asked a question gloomily:

"Is it necessary, señor, that we should still keep up this pressure of steam?"

From the moment of leaving Tampico, the *April Day* had been making her full nine knots an hour. It now appeared to Captain Jacobo that the time had come when this rate of speed was no longer essential. He wanted to put his vessel into an easier stride, to be able to clean her from the coal dust and burnt cinders that littered her decks. He was a cautious man, suspicious of flowing champagne, the large doings and extravagant ambitions of Alverado. And the dropping of red-hot coal on the decks of a vessel carrying many thousand gallons of petroleum did not seem to him a cautious proceeding.

"Yes, yes," conceded Alverado, "choose such pace as you wish to make, captain; we are now out of harm's way." He drew forth a map that had been lying upon the table in front of de Mattos, and, taking a pencil from his pocket, pointed to a spot upon it, then looked inquiringly at Jacobo.

"Yes, that is our position to within a few miles," answered the captain. "With your permission, señor, I will give orders to decrease our speed."

He rose and, with a slight bow towards Alverado, moved out of the saloon and ascended the companion to the bridge.

Alverado put his pencil back in his pocket and also rose.

"José," he observed, "your company is vastly entertain-

ing, but I think I am aware of company even more nicely to my taste!"

"What company, señor?"

"Our lady passenger!"

A moment later Alverado's long white-clad legs vanished up the brass-bound steps. The moment José de Mattos was left alone, he lifted an exploratory finger to the top of his bald head. There was still a lump there—a quite definite lump!

Alverado, having reached the deck, took a key from his pocket, and walked slowly and leisurely for'ard. Here, descending another companion, he came to a row of cabins and opened a stateroom door. He had entered the best stateroom in the vessel, the one which was usually allotted to the *April Day's* captain. Light and air were supplied by two brass-rimmed portholes, both of which were open. The interior of the cabin was painted white, and, in addition to two berths, a locker with comfortable cushions upon it ran the length of the little apartment beneath the open portholes. From this locker a figure leapt up as Alverado swung open the door and stepped deftly inside.

"Am I welcome?" he inquired. A smile of cold mockery, which de Mattos hated, came over his face.

"You are never welcome! If you were not utterly shameless and contemptible, you would not dare to come in like that, as you do!"

Edna Everdale, in making this retort, lifted her fine head, and flashed a look into Alverado's face which would have intimidated anyone of less hard shell than the big Mexican.

She was pale, and though terror gripped her heart, as

it had gripped it during many hours past, from the very moment, in fact, when the Mexican blanket had been thrown over her head, she was not cowed. She had been carried a helpless bundle to Alverado's boat. She had lived through a night of terror, every instant of which had been a torture. She knew herself to be in the hands of a man who had already stained his hands in blood—the murderer, in fact, of Norman Grant. She was alone with Alverado, upon a ship of which he was master, traveling to an unknown destination. What his intentions were she could not guess. But until now his behavior had given her a faint ray of hope.

Now, however, as the afternoon sun glinted aslant through the portholes, glowing upon her cheek and rich, dark hair, she noticed a sudden change in the dark man's expression. He looked at her with a quick intentness, as though he had seen her for the first time in his life. Then, standing back and surveying her slowly and critically, he put up a long, powerful hand and stroked his chin. And still he looked at her, still held her with those chilling and penetrating eyes of his.

"Jesu Christi," he said suddenly in Spanish—he spoke slowly and partly to himself—"but you are an amazingly lovely woman!"

Edna receded a pace.

"If you have an ounce of good feeling in you, Señor Alverado," she said, looking at him courageously in the eyes, "you will leave me to myself."

He came nearer. He bent from his great height and looked down at her, and suddenly she felt her face enclosed in his big hands and tilted upwards. "Beautiful

woman," he said, drawling the words—"beautiful, beautiful woman!"

Then he released her and tapped her lightly on the shoulder. "But we shall be friends, you and I," he laughed—"oh, yes, very good friends!"

The change in his manner seemed to freeze the blood in Edna's veins; a tightness was in her throat.

"I implore you, señor, to leave me."

Alverado was now standing a little way from her, looking over her from head to foot. An air of thoughtfulness had come upon him, and presently he drew forth his watch.

"You will give me the pleasure of dining in the saloon, to-night, Señorita Everdale," he said: "we shall dine at eight."

"I shall not be there."

He looked at her for a moment, then said:

"Very well, señorita, that will suit my purpose even better. We shall be able to enjoy a *tête-à-tête*; my dinner shall be served here!"

He was too quick for her, too clever and masterful. And as he moved away and drew open the door of the cabin to go out, an idea seized her.

There was one way out.

If she could achieve the deck on any pretext whatever, she could save herself from him after all. He knew her very little indeed, if he thought her a woman whose spirit could be easily broken. She was resolved to throw herself overboard rather than remain a prisoner in his hands.

In as natural a voice as possible, she asked him if he would permit her to take the air on deck, saying that she

had been a prisoner for fourteen hours. For a moment he hesitated, then laughed and shook his head.

"No, no, señorita, not yet. *Au revoir* until eight o'clock. Perhaps after that, in the moonlight, you will like to take the air."

With that he went out, locking the door behind him.

CHAPTER XXXI

"WHAT'S that, José?"

Alverado and de Mattos were pacing the deck beneath the sun-awning. An hour had passed since the big man's visit to Edna's cabin. The sun hung low in the vast, still, and cloudless azure. There was scarcely a ripple on the sea, and from the deck of the *April Day* the mirror-like floor reached to an horizon of sun-illuminated gold. The distant rim of the sea itself made a definitely perceptible line of darker hue, and it was near this line, looking southwards, that Alverado had suddenly fixed his attention.

"José," he exclaimed, gripping the fat man by the sleeve, "there is something there!"

José turned and saw at a great distance a faint fleck of white that might have been a large bird and was not.

"There is something on the water there, moving," said Alverado.

His brows drew together in perplexity; then he turned, hurried along the deck, and ascended the companion to the bridge.

Here he found Jacobo pacing back and forth, and pointed southward.

"What do you make of that, captain?" he asked. Jacobo looked.

"It's some sort of small craft, señor," he answered; then went to a locker that was also a seat and took out his Zeiss glasses.

He stood for some moments focussing the lenses. Presently he turned, and looked with a puzzled expression at Alverado.

The big man, reading his astonishment, seized the glasses. "It's a motor-boat, Jacobo," he said a moment later.

"Yes, señor, but what boat? And for what purpose is she following us?"

In the round circles of the binoculars, Alverado could plainly see the awning of the *Porfirio*, the pile of dividing water on either side of the *Porfirio's* knife-like prow. The tiny craft was pursuing them at an enormous speed. There was no doubt about her intention, even to Alverado. He, too, presently lowered the glasses and looked down at his captain.

"That boat," expatiated Jacobo, after a further scrutiny, "must have followed us from Tampico. The only vessel I know of that quality along this coast," he went on, "is the craft owned by Flores, the pecan merchant."

"What does the pecan merchant want with us?" Alverado questioned sharply; "he is not one of our followers."

Captain Jacobo shook his head, and for some ten or fifteen minutes after that the two men, leaning over the end of the bridge on the starboard side, watched the diminutive craft. It came gliding over the floor of the mirror-smooth sea, that molten mirror, like some strange, purposeful live thing. Its neat lines, its bright coloring and gay awning, gave it a holiday effect. There was nothing sinister or in any way formidable in its appearance.

A mere toy was racing in pursuit of a vessel of two thousand tons. The situation lost its air of portentous-

ness. Whoever the persons in the boat might be, they were incapable of bringing harm to the *April Day*. But still Alverado was perplexed. Presently he descended to the deck, and found the rail lined with all the members of the crew who could spare a moment. A sailor had already recognized the oncoming craft as the *Porfirio* of Tampico, and shouted his information to Alverado.

De Mattos, who had possessed himself of a pair of binoculars, suddenly exclaimed:

"There are two men aboard!"

"Do you know them?"

De Mattos, his glass still on the distant boat, suddenly drew in his breath, puffed out his lower lip strangely, and uttered a gasp.

"Señor," he said to Alverado in a big staccato squeak, "one of the men is Captain Biddeford."

Alverado took the glass. He remained still and intent as a watching animal until he also recognized Biddeford.

Slowly he turned: "You are right, José."

Soon after this, one after another of the crew recognized the second man aboard the tiny *Porfirio* as Sam Ducat. And the *Porfirio* was pursuing them! A cockleshell with a crew of two pursuing the *April Day*!

The audacity of the pursuit took Alverado's breath away. The thing was beyond madness. Biddeford must know that. He was the last man in the world not to take advantage of every chance offered him against an enemy. And yet he had dared. . . .

* * * * *

When the *Porfirio* was a few hundred yards away, Sam Ducat, who was now at the engine, swung her sharply

about and began to run parallel with the *April Day*. Biddeford, standing forward clinging to the upright of the bright awning, called on the big vessel to stop. Sebastian Alverado, who could not hear him, leaned on the rail and watched with intent eyes.

Biddeford remained standing for'ard, supporting himself by the rail of the striped awning. His tiny vessel raced through the water with immense power, and momentarily it closed upon the *April Day*.

"Throw me a line!" he shouted, shielding his mouth with his hand.

This time he was no more than fifty yards away, and his voice traveled clearly to Alverado. A pause ensued; then Alverado shouted back:

"What do you want?"

"I want to come aboard," returned Biddeford coolly.

"And then?" asked Alverado—"what then?"

"Never mind; throw me a line," shouted the young man from below. He was now within a few yards of the *April Day's* starboard side.

Sam manœuvred the little craft till there was scarcely fifteen feet between the *Porfirio* and the big vessel.

Alverado, who had been looking thoughtfully at Biddeford, waved an arm imperiously.

"Go away, while you are safe," he menaced.

"Throw me a rope," shouted Biddeford, "or I'll follow you till you do!"

Alverado stepped back from the rail, out of Biddeford's line of vision, and called Jacobo from the bridge, with a commanding gesture.

"This fool," he said in a low tone to the captain,

"means what he says. Can you think of a way of getting rid of him?"

Captain Jacobo thought for a moment, then shook his head.

"No, señor; the little boat is too quick for us. His intention appears to be to follow us, señor."

"Then his intention is not mine," Alverado retorted. "De Mattos," he called over his shoulder.

The fat man joined them.

"It appears," said Alverado, "that I am the only person able to deal with the man Biddeford."

"How, señor?"

"Bring me a rifle and you shall see."

José de Mattos stared a moment; then, taking in the idea, hurried away with alacrity.

Two minutes later, Alverado moved to the starboard rail with a rifle in his hand. Biddeford saw him, and like a flash darted beneath his awning. That movement saved his life. Alverado fired, and the bullet drilled a hole in the pecan merchant's floor-boards. Biddeford was now out of sight, and for a moment his little vessel turned aside, but for a moment only. Biddeford's head bobbed from beneath the awning.

"That game won't help you, Alverado," he shouted. And before Alverado could fire again he had vanished. Sam Ducat, however, now decided that a succession of rifle-bullets through the awning above them would be about as unsalutary a thing as could occur.

He had no particular desire to die, or that Biddeford should die, and he swung his steering wheel, intending to drop behind the big vessel. He did drop behind. But the heavy water about the *April Day's* screws suddenly

caught the little craft—caught it, drew it under her towering height, pitched it upward like a cork, then turned it completely over. The crew, running aft along the *April Day's* decks, saws the *Porfirio's* screws spinning madly in the sunlight. The slender-built motor-boat, in the manner of a stricken animal, heaved and wallowed as she slowly sank. A silence fell aboard the big vessel. Then two heads appeared in the swell of the *April Day's* wake, and a boisterous shout arose.

Alverado's sailors and Escabodo's soldiers, crowding the liner's rail, could see Biddeford, followed by Sam, shake the water out of his eyes and swim steadily to the upturned craft. But the little gay *Porfirio*, very low in the water, was already in her death-throes.

Alverado took a cigar out of his case, lit it, and leaned against the *April Day's* rail. The two figures in the water and their sinking boat were fast growing smaller and smaller. Of a surety now Alverado knew that he was safely and forever rid of the most resourceful enemy who had ever opposed him. His own and Mattos' vengeance were complete. If José de Mattos wanted vengeance for that blow on the skull, he was now receiving it to the full.

Never had Alverado's fundamental brutality shown itself so brutal as now. No pity stirred in him for the two helpless men in the water; no succor could come to them on that empty sea, but there were no stirrings in his heart. And when at last the *Porfirio*, with a final lurch, disappeared beneath the water, he continued to smoke and watch. Nothing now was visible in the trail of the *April Day* save two heads, one black and round, one grizzled and elderly. Alverado, drawing at his cigar, considered

that the two would keep afloat probably for an hour or two. After that the end would come. Well, Biddeford had dared to cross his path; let him drown. He could see the young man waving an arm now for help. And no help would be forthcoming. . . .

But Alverado, with all his subtlety and cleverness, had reckoned without the good which is to be found in every human being. The men aboard his ship were most of them ruffians, but they were at least human, and the courage of the two struggling men who had pursued and dared to confront them had not been without its results.

A dark-skinned quartermaster thrust his way through the watching crowd towards Alverado, and spoke to him in Spanish.

"We want those men to be saved, señor," he said, looking boldly into the tall man's face.

Alverado eyed the quartermaster through narrowed lids, then signalled Jacobo forward.

"This man, captain," he said, "should be punished for insubordination. Say what you have to say to your captain."

Boldly and readily the quartermaster turned to the captain. Other men separated from the crowd and came up behind their spokesman.

"We are not murderers!"

Jacobo hesitated and glanced for support to Alverado.

The men behind the quartermaster, dark-visaged, undeniable ruffians, took up the tale.

"If you don't give out the order, we will put about ourselves."

The determination of the mob's leaders brought still others to join the group. The unanimous trend of feel-

ing showed itself in favor of saving the two men in the sea. Urgent shouts and demands for the vessel to be put about arose on the outskirts of the crowd. Alverado was a man who knew how to handle a crisis to his own advantage. He suddenly shrugged his shoulders, and laughed.

"Come, men, don't be fools! I was only pretending to punish these insolent fools who had dared to follow us."

"Well, put about and save them, or we'll do it ourselves," called a voice.

"Certainly; the captain already has my orders," he called loudly. He turned to Captain Jacobo, nodded, and Jacobo instantly gave an order.

Ten minutes later Biddeford, dripping water on the *April Day's* deck, stood leaning against the ship's rail. Breathing heavily beside him stood Sam Ducat, glowering sullenly into the crowd of dark faces.

CHAPTER XXXII

THESE vivid occurrences on deck, the slowing of the vessel, the sound of rifle-shots, the shouts and scurry of feet, conveyed nothing to Edna. She was occupied through it all with her own thoughts, with dread at the impending visit of Alverado. Almost moment by moment she glanced at her wrist-watch. A strange sensation of being lost in a dark forest with a stealthy and predatory animal creeping upon her forced itself into her mind. If Alverado had permitted her to go upon the deck, many chances might have arisen. But here in this stifling cabin there was no escape. The white walls and the heavy door closed upon her like a trap.

Her thoughts went to Martin Biddeford, and for a few moments her situation seemed not quite utterly desperate, after all. Biddeford was so resourceful, so swift in action—surely he would do something. Then her mind fell back upon the cold facts of the situation. What could he do? The *April Day* had escaped, was lost in the vast area of the Mexican Gulf. No; there was no hope of rescue, she told herself. The situation was as it was, and nothing could mend it.

And the hours were speeding. At eight bells Alverado would descend for that *tête-à-tête*. She lifted her watch and pressed it against her ear. The ticking seemed to vibrate through her being like a voice of menace.

Edna suddenly lifted her head. A thought came to her. What an utter fool she had been to refuse Alverado's

invitation to dinner in the saloon! A chance of escape from this trap had been given to her, and she had refused it! The thought of death was awful to her. But in the ultimate issue she would face death. The look in Alverado's eyes had changed; the hard stare had become a leer. . . . At the thought of that her blood stilled in her veins, became like ice.

There was no bell in the little cabin. She rose and began to beat with her fists upon the locked door. She hammered and called aloud, but no answer came to her summons. Someone, however, advanced along the corridor outside, listened, and went away. She gave up at last in despair, climbed on the locker, and stood looking out over the darkening sea. The sun set, and a cool wind came to her through the open porthole. Again and again she glanced at her watch.

Eight bells.

She could see his hard smile melting into a leer . . . a *tête-à-tête*. . . . What was that? Eight bells was sounding. Immediately afterwards footsteps reached her from the gangway outside; a key clanked in the lock; the door opened. To her amazement, the man who stood on the threshold was not Alverado, but a steward, carrying a tray. Behind the steward, loitering in the passage, Edna could see her armed guard. Without a word, the steward dexterously spread his cloth and laid a knife and fork—for one! What had occurred to bring this respite? She dared not ask. The steward, having laid the meal, went away without a word, closing and locking the door behind him.

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A little before eight bells that evening, Biddeford was taken out of the locked cabin in which he and Sam had been thrust, and under a guard of two men was marched to the saloon. This was his first chance of confronting Alverado since he and Sam made their appearance aboard. He found the big man alone at the head of the table, in the light of the swinging lamp. The Mexican looked at him with an inimical expression.

"Sit down, Captain," he commanded.

Biddeford seated himself, and observed that the two armed men who had escorted him thither took up a position behind him.

Alverado spoke again in a hard, truculent voice.

"There are one or two matters outstanding between us, Captain, that would be the better for discussion."

"That is my opinion, too," retorted Biddeford quietly. "Before I came aboard——"

"Before I had you hauled out of the water," interrupted Alverado.

"Before I came aboard," continued Biddeford steadily, "I made known to the British authorities the fact that you had kidnapped Miss Everdale, and had her aboard this vessel."

Alverado's expression changed; he looked keenly into Biddeford's eyes, and then laughed.

"And what can the British authorities do?"

"You will learn that pretty soon, señor," Biddeford answered. "An interview with this old tanker of yours and the British Navy would be devilish unpleasant for you."

Alverado waved his hand airily.

"In forty-eight hours," he said, "we shall arrive at our

destination. Nothing you, Captain, or the British Navy can do will alter the fact that a new Government has been established in Southern Mexico. When we get ashore we shall be welcomed as victors. Now, Captain," he said, suddenly leaning forward and wagging a finger at Biddeford, "you will be good enough to keep in mind that the quarrel between you and me is not yet settled. For many weeks you have expended your time probing into my affairs. You dogged me from Hartlepool with a good deal of pertinacity. I have known for long that you are an agent of the British Government in the pay of Lord Hyde of Codsall. Lord Hyde, in my mind, is no friend of Mexico. He is attempting to secure oil from us at a price we consider preposterously low. He, on behalf of his Government, has purchased a concession which will soon not be worth the paper on which it is written. That concession is in my keeping. You have spent many unsuccessful weeks trying to get it. The total result of your effort is that you find yourself aboard this ship, a helpless prisoner. Your confederate, Miss Everdale, is in like position. She also is my prisoner. The situation is dramatic and interesting to me, but devilish unpleasant for you. The cards have gone against you from the beginning. If things had been the other way about I should have received no mercy from your hands. You will naturally expect none from me." He paused and concluded: "Is that clear, Captain?"

"Quite," admitted Biddeford. "Now, what about Miss Everdale? I want an assurance that she will be well treated and put ashore at the first opportunity."

Alverado rose and leaned towards him.

"Miss Everdale," he said, "will get such treatment as

she deserves. I have no doubt she and I can handle our own affairs without your aid."

Biddeford stiffened.

"I mean to have an understanding about this——"

"In that case you shall have it, Captain." Alverado thrust out his chin; a light flashed in his sinister eyes. "In three days," he said slowly and deliberately, "your interest in Miss Everdale—or in any other matter concerned with this world—may be at an end. Do you understand me?"

Biddeford was silent for a moment; then he said quietly:

"Certainly; you intend to assassinate me—if it happens to suit your purpose."

"You use the wrong word, Captain. Your removal, if it occurs, will be described on our records—our official records—as execution. You will be reported to General Escabodo as attempting to interfere with the establishment of the New Republic. For that the punishment is death."

"The British Government will look upon it as assassination," retorted Biddeford.

"Perhaps," agreed Alverado, "but by that time you will have lost all interest in the matter."

Having delivered himself of this remark, he considered that the interview had arrived at a satisfactory conclusion, and abruptly signalled the two guards.

"Take Captain Biddeford to his cabin, lock him in, and bring me the key."

As the men closed in behind him, Biddeford stood for a moment facing his adversary; the space of only a yard lay between them. An impulse to leap at the big man's

throat seized him, and passed. But his brain was extraordinarily clear. If there was any way of safety to find for Miss Everdale, he meant to find that way; for something in Alverado's words in regard to her had intimidated him more than the threat to take his own life.

"Do you mean to keep me locked up all the voyage, señor?" he asked, as the two guards led him towards the foot of the companion.

"I shall keep you locked up until we reach our destination," said Alverado.

He watched Biddeford ascend the companion, then returned to his chair at the table. But he was not easy in mind. The fact that Biddeford had aroused the authorities was a new and an unpleasant factor in the game, on which he had not counted. His own and Escabodo's plan had been to create a sudden flare of revolution. Escabodo now awaited him ashore, accompanied by an army, fairly well equipped. Aboard the *April Day* itself were certain essential stores, and had it not been for the necessity of shipping oil in order to allay suspicion at Tampico, those stores would have been vastly greater in quantity. Only a single danger threatened, and Captain Jacobo had already drawn his attention to it. At Vera Cruz were two or three Mexican gunboats which could outspeed the *April Day*. If Biddeford had been right in his threat, these boats were probably looking for him now.

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Martin was escorted back to his cabin, under the close guard which had controlled his liberty in the saloon. As he passed along the deck he made an effort to learn from them something of Miss Everdale's place of incarceration,

but each man, evidently under instructions, shook his head and made no answer, save a peremptory gesture of his carbine.

When Biddeford at length stepped into the cabin where Sam awaited him, and heard the door drawn sharply to, and locked, he found the little apartment in total darkness.

"Don't they allow us a light, Sam?"

"No," Sam growled out of the gloom. "I yelled for one while you was away, but a couple of dagoes with carbines come in and said they'd blow my head off if I didn't stop hollering."

He shuffled uneasily in the gloom, then said invitingly: "You was a long time away, Captain."

"Yes," said Biddeford ruefully. "I couldn't get any good news out of him. Sam, this ship's teeming with armed men. There must be fifty or sixty aboard beside the crew. Out of the tail of my eye I saw drilling going on aft. Miss Everdale must be in one of the port-side cabins, but I could get nothing out of Alverado about her."

He groped his way to the lower bunk and seated himself on its edge, leaning forward with his elbows on his knees and his chin in his hands. He was glad Sam could not see him, for something very like despair welled up in his usually buoyant mind.

There was silence between the two friends for some minutes; then Martin became aware of vague movements on Sam's part.

"What are you doing, Sam?"

"Fingerin' this door-lock, Cap'en. I been at it all the time you was away."

Biddeford rose and, groping his way, joined him. The

big brass lock screwed upon the inside surface of the door was not embodied in the door itself. Biddeford passed his fingers over it in the darkness, and he, too, became absorbed in the possibility of defeating its effectiveness. But presently he went back and reseated himself upon the bunk.

"Sam," he said, swept for the moment by dejection, "it makes no matter if we do get out, we can't hold up this ship; we can't help Miss Everdale."

"We could do better out than in," returned the indomitable Sam.

"How?"

"It would cheer up the young lady if she know'd we was aboard."

Biddeford rose again and stretched himself.

"Sam," he said, "you are a better man than I am by a long chalk. You've got more sand, but it seems to me we should be simply aggravating her misery."

Nevertheless fifty seconds later, with the volatility of youth, he was pushing Sam away from the door.

"Here, Sam," he said, "get out of the way; let me have a try."

CHAPTER XXXIII

NEXT afternoon scarcely a breath of air stirred on the deck of the *April Day*, and a languor that was almost torpor settled on all aboard. But when the sun began to descend, a faint zephyr flickered the fringe of the striped deck awning. Alverado, luxuriously stretched upon the saloon cushioned locker, was smoking a cigar and reading various documents of importance to himself and his schemes. The first officer, more Indian than Mexican, with a long cigar in the corner of his mouth and his hands behind his back, slowly paced the bridge.

The for'ard deck was empty, and within the chart-house sat McGuire at the wireless set which had been installed in Tampico Harbor. He was in his shirtsleeves, and lank black hair hung damply over his forehead. Languidly, his narrow, yellow-skinned hand swung the pointer of his instrument. He was searching the ether on the chance of intercepting a Mexican Government message, or any other message that might be of possible value to Alverado, or might be addressed to Alverado from General Escabodo's place of retreat in the hills. On the table at his elbow lay an ash-tray, cluttered with cigarette ends.

With McGuire in the chart-house was Captain Jacobo, leaning against his big table with a chart spread under his eyes. Jacobo's fingers held a pencil, and presently, after referring to certain figures on a slip of paper, he made a

little cross at a particular spot in latitude ten north in the Mexican Gulf. He was indicating for Alverado's benefit the exact position of the *April Day* at midday, some hours earlier.

Having marked his chart, Jacobo slid from the stool and rolled up the map, creating a perceptible rustle in the quiet little room. Then he turned, with the pleasant intention of descending to refreshment in the saloon with Alverado. As his eyes fell upon the chart-house door, however, it happened that the door itself was in the very act of slowly opening. And before Jacobo could utter a word the aperture had widened enough to admit the figure of a tall man, who stepped noiselessly inside. The door remained wide, and following the tall man a short squat fellow with a thick beard stepped in. The door, which had gaped without sound, now closed again, and was instantly locked with a metallic click that was startling in the dreamy afternoon silence.

McGuire turned sharply at the sound, and found Biddeford towering over him. There was a deadly warning in Biddeford's eyes, and his right hand was ominously behind his back. There was nothing in his right hand, but McGuire did not know that.

Words came from Biddeford with a deep and vibrant note that McGuire could well remember.

"Mac," he said, "if you lift your voice——"

"What's your game?" McGuire asked, his eyes staring.

"Never mind," said Biddeford; "your game's up. Where d'you keep your gun?"

"I haven't got a gun," said McGuire.

He was all to pieces at this sudden appearance of

Biddeford, whom he had believed to be safely a prisoner below.

"Very well, where does the captain keep his?"

"I don't know."

"Tell me," said Biddeford through his teeth, "or I'll let you have it!"

Cleverly, he still kept his right hand behind him, and there was much virtue and authority in the non-existent weapon he held in it.

During this swift interchange of amenities, Sam Ducat, with legs a little apart and arms thrust out from his side, stood watching Jacobo and guarding the closed door like a goalkeeper awaiting a charge. But there was no charge from Jacobo. He looked from Biddeford to Sam and back again with staring, frightened eyes.

"Sam, tell Jacobo," said Biddeford over his shoulder, "to show you the drawer where he keeps his gun."

Sam murdered a few words of the Spanish language and bared his teeth in the captain's face.

"Where's your gun?"

Jacobo wavered, and Sam moved forward for a clinch. Then, with a spasmodic jerk, Jacobo pointed to two keys hanging above his map-table.

A moment later, Biddeford, with the keys in his fingers, was opening the drawers in Captain Jacobo's desk. In the second drawer he came upon a heavy Smith and Wesson thirty-eight calibre revolver. He slipped aside the barrel, saw that it was loaded in six chambers, and poised it in his hand. It was a serviceable weapon—a little old-fashioned, perhaps, but quite sufficiently effective to control the room at that moment.

"If I'd known you had no gun——" said McGuire savagely.

"Close your face," commanded Biddeford, "or I'll be after you."

Revolver in hand, he turned towards Captain Jacobo.

"Get on your stool, captain, and turn your back."

The black-bearded Jacobo obeyed. He knew a dangerous man when he saw one, and the little chart-house at that moment was electric with impending fatality.

The moment Jacobo was seated, Biddeford wheeled towards McGuire, who had taken a cigarette and lit it with a hand that was not quite so steady as he believed.

"McGuire," said Biddeford, "sit down at your machine."

McGuire took a puff at his cigarette, exhaled the smoke in the air, and remained nonchalantly standing.

"Sit down," breathed Biddeford, striding at him, and pushing the revolver muzzle painfully into his waist-coat.

McGuire sat down.

"Now get out your code-book."

"I haven't got a code-book."

Biddeford turned the revolver, took it by the barrel, and rapped McGuire on the head with the butt. The blow was not intended to hurt, but merely to awaken the wireless man to the seriousness of the moment.

McGuire slowly unlocked a drawer and took out a flat book.

"What do you want me to do?"

"I want you to send a message at my dictation. You are pretty good at sending messages, Mac, on certain occasions."

McGuire flushed darkly, and looked at him out of the tail of his eye. "What message do you want me to send?"

"I intend you to send out a message that can be picked up by the station at Tampico or Mexico City."

"I can't reach Mexico City," said McGuire, leaning back in his chair; "this is a five hundred kilowatt Marconi ship set."

"With a range of five hundred miles or so," Biddeford remarked. "That will suit me all right. Now send this."

McGuire leaned forward and began to move his pointer. Biddeford, watching his every movement, seated himself on the edge of the operator's table.

"Mac," he said solemnly, "don't try any monkey tricks. I can read every word you send, and, what's more, I happen to know the tune of the Mexican receiving station. So don't spend too many hours swinging that pointer. Get along and find the right wave."

McGuire instantly fixed his pointer at a certain wavelength which communicated with the Mexican official station; having done this, he dropped his hand to his side and sat sullenly in his chair. Biddeford prodded him with the revolver. "Send this message," he said.

"Message to Governor of Tampico. Sebastian Alverado's ship *April Day* now making a course—" He suddenly turned his head. "Sam," he called, "I will just have a look at that chart if you don't mind. Tell the captain to mark his position for me."

Sam translated to Jacobo, and Jacobo with his finger showed the position already marked on the chart.

Biddeford turned again to McGuire, and gave the precise position of the *April Day* at twelve noon.

McGuire, who had been taking down the message in pencil, looked up.

"Is that all?"

"That's all that message," said Biddeford—"send it."

McGuire reached forward and tapped out the message.

Biddeford listened intently during its progress into the ether. "Now," he ordered, "send this—a private message:

"'British Vice-Consul, Tampico. Captain Biddeford and Ducat are aboard *April Day* with Miss Everdale. Will do all can to take care her. Advise Colonel Everdale, c/o British Ministry, Mexico City.'"

He watched McGuire closely as this second message was transmitted; then he took out his handkerchief and wiped his brow. Save for his own voice and the click of the instrument, there had been intense silence in the little cabin. Sam Ducat, alert and intently watchful over Jacobo, had remained standing in the middle of the floor. Captain Jacobo, resting his head on his hands, had made no effort to move from the chart table. Both he and McGuire believed the intrusion to be at an end, but Biddeford rose, strode across the little room, and gripped Jacobo heavily by the shoulder.

"Captain," he said—the captain looked up with a startled expression, and saw himself looking into his own weapon, held in a very masterly hand—"Captain Jacobo, I want your master key."

"He doesn't understand English," Sam joined in.

"Well, tell him what I want, Sam."

Sam translated, and Jacobo pointed to a drawer in his table. He had been completely cowed by this skilfully

devised hold-up. Biddeford went to the drawer and took out a key.

"Now," he demanded, "which cabin is Miss Everdale locked in?" Jacobo shook his head. Biddeford moved his hand menacingly.

"Let me go, señor; I have no quarrel with you. The señorita is in the first cabin on the port side."

Biddeford released his hold.

"Sam," he said, "we must get out of this, and see if we can help Miss Everdale."

Before going, however, he ran through the captain's drawers searching for a second weapon. There was none in the room."

The whole business, from their entrance in the chart-house till the moment of their departure, had occupied less than ten minutes. Sam, preceding Biddeford, unlocked the chart-house door, stepped out stealthily, and instantly stepped in again. There was consternation in his face.

"They have got us, Captain," he said; "we are caught."

Biddeford thrust him aside, drew open the door, and looked out. Ten feet away, for'ard, along the deck, six men were standing with carbines at the ready. Four other men were above, with carbines resting over the canvas shelter of the bridge. Carbines were levelled upon them from a dozen other places. A man, whose dark nightmare face and carbine muzzle were alone visible, was reclining on the nearby hatchway covering them with his weapon.

Biddeford halted. He possessed the usual equipment of courage of a young man of his age, nationality, and training. But he was not a fool. He could have stepped

out upon that deck, made a fantastic assault upon his waiting enemies, and been dead within ten seconds. He knew that when once he was dead he would remain dead so long it might become monotonous. He hated, with a consuming hate, all these dark-skinned, triumphant Mexicans, who were waiting for a word of command to fire. He hated being beaten. From where he stood, in the chart-house doorway, he could see Alverado and José de Mattos regarding him in quiet triumph.

"I would like to have a word with Señor Alverado," said Biddeford, breaking the silence.

Alverado came forward, his fine teeth gleaming.

"I am sorry to inconvenience you, Captain," he remarked, "but if you will be good enough to throw that weapon you hold along the deck, we shall be able to converse with far less danger to yourself."

Biddeford looked at the bristling carbines, and said in Sam's ear: "We must play a waiting game, Sam." Then, followed by the short man, he stepped out beneath the awning of the deck.

He might have shot down Alverado before surrendering the revolver. But that would have been a mad thing to do, for his own life and Sam's were an asset, or might possibly in the future be an asset, to Miss Everdale. In any case, he was not entitled to bring extinction upon Sam, who had stood beside him so valiantly, and who was now muttering most unpleasant curses at his elbow.

"There you are," he said, and flung his weapon to the deck. A soldier, at an order from Alverado, reached forward and picked up the revolver.

At that moment Captain Jacobo emerged from the chart-house. Jacobo felt no pride in the incidents of the

last fifteen or twenty minutes, and he was not as voluble as might have been expected for so emphatic a Latin. He briefly explained to Alverado that Biddeford and Sam had "held up" the chart-house, and that Biddeford at that moment was possessed of his master key.

"You let an unarmed man rob you of that!" Alverado said in contempt, holding up Jacobo's pistol.

He turned and motioned forward the man with the nightmare face.

"You will find a key in the tall Englishman's pocket; bring it to me."

Biddeford permitted the man to extract the captain's key from his pocket. He was surrendering his last advantage. But there was no hope of resistance. Alverado noticed the ease with which the key was surrendered.

"I observe, Captain," he said, "that you begin to realize the awkwardness of your predicament."

Biddeford lifted his head.

"I observe sixteen men protecting you with carbines," he said; "couldn't you have made it twenty, señor?"

Alverado's eyes blazed for a moment, then he checked himself.

"You are witty, Captain," he said smoothly, "but I will talk to you presently, and I have no doubt that the last word will be with me."

McGuire had not so much emerged as oozed from the chart-house, and was now, with a cigarette in his fingers, draped against its doorpost.

Alverado saw the wireless man and turned to him.

"Now," he said, "what's your story? Step forward, please."

His tone lashed McGuire like a whip, but he was in the big man's hands, and he knew it well.

"Why," demanded Alverado, "were you not able to rescue Captain Jacobo from these two men?"

"They took us unawares," said McGuire sullenly.

"And their sole reason was to get possession of the captain's master key?"

There was a moment's pause, and Biddeford felt its tension acutely. Then McGuire said:

"I suppose so." The fact that he had despatched a wireless message under threat from Biddeford was not one which he wished to make known to Alverado. Captain Jacobo might make it known, but that was improbable, for Jacobo knew practically no English.

Alverado looked into McGuire's face closely for a moment. At the back of his mind a faint suspicion had stirred that possibly McGuire, being a fellow-countryman of Biddeford, had formed some sort of secret alliance with him. But the idea departed when he saw McGuire turn and scowl at Biddeford.

"So," remarked Alverado, fixing his attention again on Biddeford, "your intention was to pay a visit to Miss Everdale?"

"My intention," said Martin slowly, "was to release Miss Everdale from the cabin where you keep her locked up. Whatever your intentions may be in regard to her, it seems to me that there is no necessity for you to keep her a close prisoner."

Alverado rubbed his chin.

"Oh!" he exclaimed, "you are acting the part of the gallant and resourceful cavalier; you do it well, but not quite well enough."

"It's a mere matter of humanity," returned Biddeford. "The heat below is more than Miss Everdale can stand. I have already warned you that if any harm comes to her——"

"No harm shall come to her," said Alverado, smiling as though enjoying the topic. "To-morrow when we land, Miss Everdale will be free as air. Aboard this ship her freedom is not a feasible object. I have a sort of provision that under certain circumstances she is the sort of young woman to fling herself into the sea."

He glanced at de Mattos, who had been standing in the background, vastly enjoying Biddeford's discomfort.

"José," he said, "I will place Biddeford and Ducat in your charge. You will keep them in the chart-house until I have made arrangements with Captain Jacobo for their safe keeping. They will be safe with you, eh?"

A malicious light lurked in the depth of de Mattos' eyes.

"This time they will be safe," he answered, puffing out his lower lip.

CHAPTER XXXIV

ALVERADO strode away, and, with legs apart, de Mattos surveyed Biddeford and Sam from head to foot.

"Well?" he demanded. It was almost as though he smacked his lips, so joyous was his countenance.

"Well, what?" curtly put in Biddeford.

"You are in my charge," exulted José. His panama was far back on his bald head; a thumb was in each armhole of his waistcoat. He walked back and forth before them like a gamecock, and with as much of a strut as was possible to a man of his globular forefront.

"All these men," he exclaimed, with a sweeping gesture, "have orders to shoot."

Biddeford said not a word, and Sam Ducat, with his long arms hanging at his side, peered at him through chewing tobacco. His expression seemed to give particular offence to José, who advanced upon him and thrust out his face.

"Do you hear?—shoot!" he jibed.

"Oh, go to hell!" said Sam, and, being a sailorman of no great social training, he spat at him.

Mattos leapt from the deck with a yelp of fury. He had been outraged.

"Ah!" he shouted, and poured out a volume of Spanish blasphemy that used all his breath for fifty seconds. "Take both these men into the chart-house," he bellowed; "tie them. Ah! Jesu Christi, for this you shall suffer!"

He turned to the crowd of armed men and selected four, who, under his orders, pushed Sam and Biddeford back into the chart-house. Ropes were brought, and under José's excited orders each man was tied in a chair—Sam Ducat in McGuire's swivel chair, and Biddeford in another single-legged chair, also screwed to the floor. The four men having accomplished their task, José de Mattos tested the ropes. His face was still dark with the insult that had been put upon him. For long months he had nursed the memory of the blow Biddeford had given him in Scarthoe House. He had thirsted for revenge, and at last his enemy was delivered into his hands. As for the vile sailor Ducat—but Ducat could wait; his first business was with Biddeford. The very sight of Biddeford made him tingle with rage, and he hated him the more in that he was afraid of him; that even now, tied to the chair and unable to move hand or foot, he was afraid of him.

"Wait outside for me," de Mattos commanded his guard. "I wish to talk to these men alone."

The four armed villains went obediently out. The door closed. José stood with his back to it, and across the width of the little apartment surveyed the two helpless figures.

"Captain," said he, fixing a gloating eye on Biddeford, "you doubtless laughed that night in Scarthoe House."

"Perhaps I did," admitted Biddeford.

De Mattos puffed himself up, and blew out his lower lip after his peculiar habit. "It is now my turn to laugh."

"Well, why don't you laugh, then?" enquired Biddeford quietly.

His coolness, the contempt in his tone, maddened the fat man. His big melon-shaped body quivered, his features worked. In a paroxysm of rage he strode at Biddeford; then twice with a flat of his hand he smote him, first on one cheek and then on the other.

"Stop that!" roared Sam in a voice like thunder.

Biddeford said not a word; his face became white for a moment, then the imprint of de Mattos' hand marked itself on each cheek a vivid red.

"That," said de Mattos through his teeth, "will teach you that I am now master. It is only a beginning of what you shall suffer——"

"You hit the Captain again, you swine, and I'll murder you!" Sam suddenly broke in. He was straining at his bonds with a face of purple rage, but even his vast arms did not loosen the well-tied ropes.

De Mattos turned on him in amazement.

"You dog!" he cried, standing before him and shaking a finger in his face. "I'll deal with you later."

Sam sat watching him, still as a stone. The short sailor's eyes seemed to have grown small between puckered lids, to be no more, indeed, than two wicked points of light. The blows on Biddeford's face had stirred something primeval in him.

"I will yet," declaimed de Mattos, still shaking his fingers into Sam's face, "make you scream for mercy, you dog!"

Sam, still as a stone, watched him.

"Speak—do you hear?"

Sam was silent. But de Mattos, in his excitement, had approached his hand too near. Like a flash, with a movement of a striking rattlesnake, Sam darted forth

his head, opened his big mouth, and snapped his teeth on the fat man's fingers. There ensued a portentous moment. De Mattos fulfilled the portent of that moment with a yell of agony. He pulled, and the more he pulled, the more Sam, like a bulldog, bit into his fingers. For some minutes Sam had been watching for that chance, but de Mattos' yells were something he had not bargained for. The door of the chart-house was thrown violently open and half a dozen men came tumbling in. The men halted for a second, bewildered by the amazing scene. What they saw was de Mattos standing before one of the roped prisoners, dancing on his toes, squirming and shouting for help. Suddenly a man with a carbine strode forward and saw what was amiss. He saw de Mattos with his fingers deep in Sam's mouth, and Sam, purple in the face, holding on as if his jaw had been clamped and fastened with a padlock.

By now the whole crowd of armed men was about Sam's chair; a carbine muzzle was pushed against his head, and he slowly opened his mouth. De Mattos, moaning and nursing his bleeding fingers, staggered back, then hurried out of the cabin to have his hand dressed.

"He won't come anigh me again in a hurry," said Sam, thoroughly unrepentant.

Four men had remained as guards in the room, and for half an hour or so Biddeford and Sam were able to carry on a conversation together. At the end of that time de Mattos appeared again with his hand bandaged. His manner was subdued, but there was a vindictiveness in his expression which augured badly for his captives.

"Bring these men aft," he commanded of the guard.

Sam and Martin's ropes were then unloosed, and between two men, preceded by de Mattos, they were led out upon the deck.

Biddeford's mind was working with extraordinary rapidity, but he saw no chance of escape. The *April Day* from end to end bristled with armed men.

And below, within a few yards of him, was Miss Everdale, incarcerated in that narrow cabin. What her thoughts must be he could only surmise. Her sufferings during that day and other days, in the tropical heat, must have been agonizing. Above all, the one ray of hope was not vouchsafed; she was not aware of his presence aboard. She was without knowledge or hope of any possible chance of escape.

Biddeford looked out over the sunlit ocean, agleam now with light from the western sky. The air was exceptionally clear, and during the last half-hour, with the descent of the sun, there had come a freshness in the breeze. No land was in sight, no sail flecked the limitless waters.

Martin had been in tight corners in his life before, but had never known a moment like the present, where no ray of hope presented itself. Wild thoughts flitted through his mind as he proceeded aft. A mad impulse came to him to snatch a carbine from his guard's hand, finish de Mattos, and running aft, shoot Alverado before an alarm could be raised. This idea, wild as it was, he seriously considered for a moment. He discarded it because he would never get to Alverado alive. And if he were exterminated, as he most inevitably would be, Miss Everdale's one last chance of succor, save for Sam, would be removed. No; he must face whatever

humiliations Alverado and de Mattos intended to put upon him; he must face the situation, and wait for a possible chance.

At the door of the saloon companion he saw McGuire, and passed him without a word.

McGuire, leaning languidly against the doorpost, watched his two compatriots go. And something stirred in him that was not pity—dread seized him. He hated Biddeford more than he hated any man alive. Biddeford had robbed him of ten thousand dollars, Biddeford had kicked him ignominiously, and yet the removal of these two men, the possible death that awaited them, filled him with dread.

There was something about them, about the lithe and well-formed Biddeford, and that squat, gorilla-like fellow Ducat, that was vastly comforting. They had courage, both of them, in vast abundance.

He wished consumedly in that moment that fate had dowered him with courage, had cast him on their side, in the game of life. Then his irrepressible money greed welled up in him; there was no money in siding with them. Alverado, hateful as he was, had money to burn. There was money in the future in Alverado's service. No, no; let those two fellows go; they had played a losing game, played it to the end and lost. It was nothing to him that they should suffer.

He himself was on the winning side—big things lay before him. Alverado's New Republic looked like being a riotous and swift success, and he himself would be amongst the winners. Yes, things were all right. He took a cigarette from his large case, lit it, and, trickily causing it to adhere to his upper lip, soothed his nerves.

CHAPTER XXXV

WHEN Biddeford and Sam reached the head of the aft companion, de Mattos peremptorily ordered them to go below. Biddeford took a last glance at the wide sweep of sea, then he said suddenly:

"What's that, Sam?"

"What, Cap'en?"

"Can you make anything out on the starboard quarter seven o'clock from the sun?"

Sam, paying no heed to a carbine which prodded him from behind, looked in the direction indicated.

"It's some sort of small craft, Captain." And as he spoke a clatter of feet was heard amidships, and the little group of armed men at the head of the gangway turned to see the first officer descending from the bridge as fast as his legs would carry him. He ran aft and dashed into the saloon. A few moments later he was out on the deck again, gripping Captain Jacobo excitedly by the arm. Something was clearly amiss, and de Mattos, forgetting his prisoners, hurried away and joined Jacobo and the first officer.

The first officer thrust his binoculars into Captain Jacobo's hands. Jacobo was still peering through his glasses when Alverado's tall figure appeared on deck. José de Mattos hurried to his side and pointed. A voluble conversation ensued between them. Then Jacobo ascended to the bridge, followed by de Mattos, Alverado, and the first officer.

Biddeford's four guards, with no relaxation of vigilance, were also now occupied with the distant craft.

"What do you make of her, Sam?" Biddeford asked in a low voice.

"By her rig," said Sam, shielding his eyes with a huge hand, "she is one of the gunboats out of Vera Cruz."

"My God!" cried Biddeford; "then there is a chance for us after all."

In the meantime, on the bridge, Alverado was scrutinizing the distant vessel.

"It is some tramp steamer out of Vera Cruz," he said calmly to the captain.

But Jacobo knew better. He looked long and closely at the small, narrow craft, with its tremendous volume of black smoke.

"She is not a merchant vessel, señor."

"What, then?"

"Señor, she is one of the war vessels out of Vera Cruz!"

There was no tremor in Alverado's voice.

"Does it appear to you, Jacobo, that she is following us?"

"Yes, señor."

For some minutes after this, Alverado, the first officer, Jacobo, and de Mattos, all watched the strange craft from the bridge. The binoculars were passed feverishly from hand to hand; a vast flow of excited Spanish floated out on the evening air. And moment by moment the pursuing craft grew more definite in outline. Suddenly Jacobo uttered a groan of despair. Alverado gripped his arm.

"Well, you fool?" he demanded.

Jacobo, who had been busy with the glasses, relinquished them.

"The vessel following us, señor, is the *Republic*, and she has run up a signal for us to stop."

Alverado laid a hand on his shoulder.

"Run for it, Jacobo," he said.

"They do ten knots, señor."

"Can't we do ten knots?"

The *Republic* was now possibly four miles away, and was using every ounce of steam. Her funnel and two slim masts were clearly visible, and suddenly, in the clear evening, a new signal in bright-colored bunting replaced the first.

Alverado handed the glasses to the captain, and asked the meaning of the signal.

Jacobo read it out.

"Stop, or we fire."

"Pretend you don't see it, and run for it," urged Alverado.

Jacobo wavered and waited a further five minutes. Then through the clear air the boom of a gun reverberated; a shell from the *Republic's* four-inch gun tore up the water in a bright sparkling fountain a few hundred yards ahead. Captain Jacobo blanched again, and looked at Alverado.

"Go on," said Alverado, setting his teeth, "run for it!" And a second boom reverberated in the still air. Almost instantly there ensued a mighty crash for'ard; the top of the for'ard hatch flew into the air, and fell with a tinkle of glass. One of the starboard boats, with a hole clean through it, rocked on its davits.

Captain Jacobo suddenly covered his face with his hands.

"The oil, señor," he moaned; "you forget that. They will fire again. *Jesu Christi*, it is the end!"

His arms went out again over his head in sudden wild despair.

Then he stopped and a shudder ran through him, for Alverado, gripping him by the neck, had suddenly whipped out his automatic pistol and was pushing its muzzle into the captain's ear.

"Run for it!" he commanded through his teeth. "Do you hear? I give you thirty seconds. Run for it, curse you—run for it!"

Jacobo, threatened by instant death, and the possibility of death at any moment from the warship in pursuit, put his hands tremblingly to the telephone and ordered the *April Day* about, so that she presented a lesser target to the pursuing ship.

During this time, and during the excitement of the chase, Sam and Martin had been forgotten at the head of the fo'castle companion. Gradually the excitement, the peculiar thrill of event, which was permeating the *April Day* from end to end, caught up their four guards in its current, and the men drifted away to the crowd at the ship's rail. Sam and Martin were also too much occupied with the pursuing vessel to notice the fact that they were unguarded.

It was now that the *Republic* strung her bright row of bunting aloft.

"Sam!" exclaimed Biddeford, running his eye along the flags, "they are calling us to stop!"

The two men, intently absorbed, continued to watch,

and beneath them the engines of the *April Day* throbbed in a frantic effort at speed. Coal and cinders began to patter on the deck, a black plume of smoke darkened the sky, its trail reaching nearly to the pursuing vessel, now growing each moment more and more clear in detail.

The gay bunting on the *Republic* shook and descended, another signal ran up, and Biddeford read it aloud:

"Stop or we fire again!"

Sam gripped his short, tough beard, a sign in him of intense inner disturbance.

"If they hit us below deck, Cap'en, the oil tanks 'll be a blazing hell in five minutes!"

Biddeford was silently watching the *Republic*. The engines of the *April Day* continued to pant and throb. Her black pall of smoke continued to besmirch the amethystine pure air.

Something seemed to tighten above Biddeford's throat, choking him. The word "oil," the terror of oil, gripped him. How many thousands of gallons of oil were in the tanks below? A shell from the *Republic's* four-inch gun, a single shell in a vital part——

"They are at the gun," called Sam, gripping his arm.

"Boom!"

Both Sam and Biddeford sprang down the companion, below the level of the deck, as the first shell struck the water; on the deck voices arose.

"If Jacobo knew anything, he'd surrender now," said Biddeford through his teeth. "Look out, Sam; they are at it again."

Both men ducked below.

In a flash Biddeford saw the danger to Miss Everdale, and, without a word to Sam, he turned, dashed below,

and ran forward towards the girl's cabin on the port side. Near the engine-room he found an iron bar, which he whipped from its rack. Then he hurried on again.

There were four cabins on the port side, in one of which was Miss Everdale. With the bar he thundered at the door of each, at the same time calling her name. At the third door he heard a movement within, and tried the locked door.

"This is Biddeford," he called and a faint sound came to him, but he could hear no word. "Don't be afraid; I'm going to break the door in. Now," he called, and raised his bar, "stand back!"

As the words left his lips a deafening and thunderous roar reverberated from end to end of the vessel. Biddeford could feel her shudder, as he had seen a man shudder once in the sudden throes of death.

A shell from the *Republic* had struck the ship for'ard, and following the explosion came an appalling silence. A white cloud of smoke swept along the gangway upon him. Some men from the engine-room came up and, flitting past him like ghosts, ascended to the deck. Now he heard a thunderous clamor, above a pounding of feet, and wild Latin voices lifted tumultuously.

Sam Ducat, at the head of the gangway, had seen every incident of that fatal shot. The position of the *April Day* had been deflected a little several points eastward, and the shot had struck below decks. Sam, wondering what had happened to Biddeford, turned to the companion, and descended in search of him. He was no more than half-way down the companion when a cry of "Fire!" ran from end to end of the ship.

Sam halted. "The game's up," he muttered in the

thickness of his beard. "One of the tanks will get it in a minute." But still the toughness of the man urged him below. There were Biddeford and Miss Everdale to help. Heavy smoke blinded his eyes as he groped his way for'ard. When at last he reached Biddeford, he could scarcely see the younger man in the gloom.

"Cap'en, there's no time to lose; we are afire!"

"All right," Martin called, "I'll have her out in another minute. Go up, Sam, and see if the *Republic's* pulling over us."

A new idea had come to him; he saw a way of escape, and the thought lent power to the blows he delivered on the cabin door. The situation aboard the *April Day* was desperate, but Alverado, with the ignorance of the landsman, did not know it. At any moment the whole vessel might blow up like a keg of powder, but if before that moment came he could get Miss Everdale on deck, he determined to go over the side with her, and keep her afloat until the war vessel picked them up. When he had descended to begin the assault on Miss Everdale's door, the *Republic* was scarcely more than two knots astern. She must be much nearer now.

"Sam," he said, "Miss Everdale can swim; I intend to go over the side with her. Alverado and his crowd will be too much occupied to notice us. Are you game for that?"

"Aye," answered Sam. But he could not bring himself to say that the *Republic's* engines had been overdriven, that a tube had evidently gone, and that she was momentarily dropping farther and farther behind. But this was the fact. Sam, facing it, determined on another plan of his own. He turned, and with his strange ambling run disappeared.

When he reached the deck, the *April Day* was still going her full speed. Far away astern rode the *Republic*, the smoke from her single funnel pulsing up in short gasps.

A crowd on the *April Day's* decks was watching her with fascinated eyes. Daylight was fading, and at every revolution of the tanker's screws the war vessel dwindled in size.

A score of the *April Day's* hands were for'ard fighting the fire. A crowd of others were still aft gesticulating, shouting, wrangling among themselves as to the strange behavior of the *Republic*.

Sam looked about him. Within ten feet of where he stood were Captain Jacobo and the *April Day's* first officer standing on the deck. Jacobo caught Sam's eyes.

"There is no way on her," he said, pointing to the *Republic*.

"One of her tubes gone," explained Sam.

Captain Jacobo nodded vigorously. Then he turned his attention to the fire for'ard. The danger of pursuit was at an end, but there was still the worse danger of the fire getting a good grip below. Alverado, who had descended to the saloon to gather certain papers of value, now appeared at the door of the companion.

His face was pale, and he seemed suddenly to have grown intensely conscious of the danger which threatened the ship. Following him, from the saloon, came de Mattos, without his hat, his bald head glossy and yellow like a burnished egg. His face looked flabby. He had, as a matter of fact, in the last few minutes gone all to pieces, and the hand which fingered his fat chin visibly shook.

He kept walking up behind Alverado, touching his sleeve, and begged for news as to what was likely to happen.

"Captain Jacobo says there is danger of the oil, Sebastian."

It was as though a small dog worried and pestered a savage animal. Alverado turned once or twice and thrust him away.

"We ought to get out the boats," whimpered de Mattos; "better be captured than that we should all be blown up or be burnt to death here."

He ran towards Jacobo and clutched him by the sleeve.

"Captain," he cried, "do you not think it would be wiser to order out the boats? All these men's lives are in our hands. I think of them, not of myself. There are plenty of boats for all." His face was distorted with terror. His eyes incessantly wandered to the smoke for'ard. He made loose and flabby gestures, and Alverado, his patience gone, strode up to him.

"Fool!" he cried, "if you want a boat, take one! The war vessel has broken down. Within half an hour we shall be out of sight of her. Take a boat now, and they will see you and pick you up. You will be put against a wall and shot!"

"Shot!" echoed de Mattos, his eyes becoming circles of blank horror.

"What else?" demanded Alverado. "They are following us; our plans have been discovered; we have one slender chance in the world—that is to outdistance them and get to General Escabodo. We have only six hours' run; we shall then reach Escabodo, and the hills will hide us. We shall even yet achieve success."

Captain Jacobo, whose face was deathly white, joined in.

"If the fire touches one of the tanks, señor——"

Alverado turned on him.

"That is your business, captain," he said; "you must prevent the fire reaching the tanks; all those men aft there should be working to quench the fire. Come, that is our one chance. All must fight the fire for'ard."

His spirit dominated and steadied the two men; and a moment later he was among the crowd of soldiers aft, shouting to them, dividing them up in sections, putting each section under a separate leader, and telling them to get out every bit of hose the ship possessed.

As he issued his commands, the nature of the for'ard fire changed. The smoke which now rolled aft was dense, and put a cloud upon the vessel, showing, however, that the water in the hose-pipe was good, and that the flames, at least on deck, had been subdued. Into this blinding smoke Alverado gradually drew his men.

The smoke, dense as it was above, was thicker below, and Biddeford, plying his crowbar, suddenly felt no resistance to his blows. He had managed to break a hole in the door-jamb, and with a last mighty wrench the door flew open. In another moment he was in the little white painted cabin that imprisoned Edna. He could see her face and form only vaguely as she put out her hands and came reeling towards him.

"Thank God, you have come!" she whispered. "The noise was terrible."

"We are being chased by a Mexican gunboat. Keep up your courage and lean on me."

He could feel her hand cold in his.

"Is the ship on fire?" Her voice reached his ears feebly through the hiss of steam and stamping on the deck.

"Yes."

"But there is oil on board."

"Yes; but you must hurry."

"How did you get aboard?"

She was shaking and almost hysterical. Biddeford put his arm about her, and steadied her into the corridor.

"I will talk later. Listen; we have a chance yet. Sam Ducat is with me, and if you can be saved, we will do it."

Then the strength suddenly went out of her. He lifted her and ran aft through the blinding smoke.

At the foot of the aft companion, in clearer air, he paused and looked at her. Her face was pale, her eyes flickered open.

"I understand the danger perfectly," she breathed, with shaking lips, "but I believe in you absolutely."

CHAPTER XXXVI

DARKNESS had fallen; the fire for'ard still cast up a grey volume of smoke, and the chart-house, drenched with water from the hose-pipes, was a charred shell.

Jacobo on the bridge, with terror in his heart, was driving the vessel for all she was worth, and as he paced back and forth a sailor arrived breathless.

"The oil is alight, captain," gasped the man.

Jacobo stared at him for a moment, then descended swiftly to the deck.

At that moment up from the fo'castle companion, twenty feet skyward, leapt a column of flame, a pointed, sword-like, and terrifying conflagration. And upon that pandemonium arose. The sword-like flame lit the scene, casting a distorted scarlet glare over the ship. Men moved, running hither and thither in a singular red darkness.

All this time McGuire, nervously plucking at his lower lip, had been standing near the saloon door, looking first this way and then that in mingled fear and hope. Suddenly Captain Jacobo appeared before him, seizing his arm.

"Go below," he shouted. "The Señor Alverado has descended; tell him there is no time to lose."

His small black eyes were filled with terror, and McGuire understood enough to catch his meaning.

In the saloon danger was imminent; at any instant the

leaking tanks might explode, and Alverado was down there.

Jacobo frantically pushed him towards the saloon companion; then turned and dashed away to the lowering of the boats. A trickle of smoke mounted the companion as McGuire descended. The saloon, however, was almost free of smoke, and the wireless man could see Alverado kneeling before a safe beside the steward's china cabinet. The safe was open, and Alverado, intensely absorbed in his task, was looking into a tin despatch-box filled with documents. McGuire, anxious to know what the big man was doing, descended to his side before delivering Jacobo's urgent message. Alverado, looking up quickly, and with the japanned despatch-box in his hand, rose.

"Señor Alverado, they are getting out the boats. There will be an explosion. Captain Jacobo——"

Alverado looked at him for a moment; then, without a word, hurried to the door.

McGuire cast a glance at the open safe. Even in that crisis, with the ship on fire and death at his elbow, his ruling passion of cupidity stayed his steps. He lingered, peering down at an open drawer; only when the tall Mexican paused and harshly commanded him to ascend did he leave the saloon. There was a cunning light in his eyes as he reached the deck.

For the *April Day* the sands were fast running out. In the red glare McGuire could see men frantically busy with the boats. A roaring hiss and crackle of devouring flames sounded in his ears. Out of the red darkness the first officer suddenly ran at him and gripped his arm.

"Your boat is No. 2 port side." He spoke and dashed away.

McGuire watched him running. The decks were a pandemonium, with dark figures running hither and thither.

To McGuire the situation did not seem nearly so desperate as these dagoes made out. But they were always like that, always yelling about nothing. He glanced lingeringly at the saloon companion. It was queer about Alverado leaving all that money. . . . He had seen piled packets of greenback in that safe that made his mouth water, and within a few minutes now the ship would be deserted and that money left to sink. No. 2 port side was his boat. There was time for him to go below and up again.

His eyes gleamed, and, with a fleeting glance about him, and with soft, noiseless footsteps, he descended the saloon companion.

The money was in the safe right enough, staring him in the face—an open steel drawer filled with packets of American notes, hundred-dollar notes. These dagoes, even Alverado, had no guts.

He went on his knees, and with a sharp look over his shoulder drew out a packet. The tough, smooth feel of the notes sent a thrill of exultation through him from head to heel. Money. He had never handled a packet like that. He weighed it in his hand, flicking over its keen edges with his thumb. Above, on deck, he could hear the crowd of dagoes stamping, running, and shouting. The old game—afraid of their skins, the fools! And down below was all this money waiting, shouting aloud to be taken away. He rose with a tight, two-inch thick packet of notes in each hand, each for a hundred dollars. The old greed was in his eyes, his wry lips twisted in a con-

quering smile as he stuffed the packets into his inner pocket and buttoned his coat close. He was safe now; no one would descend. He could hear the roar of the fire. No one would ever know. How much money was there? At a guess he put it at ten thousand dollars! Why, that was the very sum he had stood to gain aboard the *Lachine*! "Blood money" Biddeford had called it, and done him out of it. Twice he had seemed to have that sum in his very hands, and twice he had lost it through Biddeford. He stepped lightly across the deserted saloon.

His senses began to take in outer impressions. He became aware that the saloon had filled with a thick, white smoke. And there was a smell of oil, an overpowering smell of petroleum. A hissing sound, with something savage and terrifying in it, smote his ears. The fire below must be gaining like one o'clock. It was quite time he went on deck.

"Ten thousand dollars!" The words rolled off his lips with the magic of rich music.

Then he turned to go.

He was at the door of the saloon, the brass-bound steps within a yard of him, when fate played the final card in his destiny. For years McGuire's ruling passion had been driving him towards this moment of fulfilment. He had greedily longed for money, and it was his now, tight-buttoned in his pocket. His foot was upon the companion step, when below decks an explosion occurred that deafened him. The saloon rocked and heaved; a great burst of fire shot out of nothingness below and poured into the saloon, forcing him back towards the open safe. A tongue of flame reached him, scorching his face. Flame, flame, flame! He had not bargained for this, and the door was

blocked by driving, ravening fire. He ran to the farthest corner of the saloon, beating his hands madly upon the panels. His voice rose in a scream of agony, calling for help. . . .

* * * * *

Meanwhile, on deck, Alverado, with his dispatch-case in his hand, hurried after Jacobo. Jacobo had chosen the smaller boat, a craft easy to handle, for the departure of himself and Alverado, and had told off half a dozen men to stand by and wait for their coming.

Two of the other boats had already been swung out, and were rowing away in the smooth water. From the deck of the vessel the rowers' faces could be seen illuminated by the glow of the burning ship.

"What's going on there?" demanded Alverado, as he and Jacobo neared their boat.

"I cannot tell, señor; I ordered the men to make ready minutes ago." He glanced aft, over his shoulder. He was mortally afraid, and knew that every moment was big with possible disaster. There had been one explosion, and others would follow. He was in an agony to get away. But instead of the boat being swung as he had ordered, he found his men were standing round a broad, squat figure with a broken oar in its hand. Much shouting and gesticulating was going on. Jacobo thrust himself forward.

"What's this?" he shouted.

A chorus of voices roared an answer at him:

"This man won't let us lower the boat, señor."

Jacobo turned sharply to the man with the oar, and saw Sam Ducat, wearing canvas shoes, torn duck trousers,

and a thin vest, which emphasized the muscles of his vast chest. His legs were set apart, squarely on the deck, and his old grey eyes, narrowed to two points of light, were watching the crowd before him. In his hand he held an oar that had been broken short, balancing it deftly as one might imagine a man in the middle ages handled a quarter-staff. Jacobo observed that he had set his back to the boat, and advanced upon him.

"Stand aside," he commanded.

Sam Ducat shifted his eyes, but stood his ground and uttered no word.

Jacobo gestured to one of his hands to push Sam aside, and, emboldened by the presence of the captain, the man advanced. Like a flash, Sam swung his oar and felled him to the deck.

"Nobody goes into this boat," he said in a deep growl.

Alverado thrust Jacobo aside, and stood forward.

"Put down that oar and stand aside," he commanded.

"This boat's engaged," said Sam. He was in deadly earnest; he meant to die on that spot rather than give up his guardianship of the boat. For the last five minutes, with the menace of his oar, he had kept at bay all Jacobo's sailors. But to keep back Alverado was another matter.

"Engaged?" queried the big Mexican. "What do you mean? Engaged by whom?"

"Captain Biddeford and the young lady," said Sam Ducat.

Alverado stared at him a moment. Then he said in Spanish and with ominous quiet: "Stand aside, you men." He spoke slowly, and at the same time he slowly took from his hip pocket a Mauser, a formidable-looking weapon.

"I will give you two seconds to stand clear."

He raised his pistol, and without a moment's thought Sam struck him heavily on the arm with the oar. All the force of the squat sailor's strength was behind that blow, and the pistol leapt into the air and fell upon the deck. Even Alverado's calm went at that.

"Pull him down!" he roared; "that man's mad! Do you hear me? Give me that gun!"

A man grabbed his gun from the deck, and four of Jacobo's sailors flung themselves at Sam. But he did not wait for their impact; instead he rushed among them, swinging his oar with all his astonishing strength. For fifty seconds he fought like a maniac.

The roar and hiss of burning wood for'ard had been growing momentarily louder. Even Alverado, landsman as he was, knew that the end of the *April Day* was very near . . . and here was this mad sailor, this henchman of Biddeford's, standing in his path. He thrust forward into the group surrounding Sam, pushing men right and left. He and Sam were face to face, the big sailor still grasping his oar, when Alverado, with a curse, fired twice into his body. Sam's grizzled face was lifted towards his. For an instant after that Ducat kept his feet. Then, with a heave, as a heavy ship founders, he lurched forward to the deck and lay still.

"Now," commanded Alverado, beckoning the men forward, "there's no time to waste."

It was now, when Jacobo's men crowded about the little boat, that seemed so strangely difficult to launch, that another explosion occurred. And suddenly the deck-seams gaped. Flames shot aloft in a dozen places, and burning wood fell in streaming fragments of light.

In the tumult of sound no one heard McGuire's scream for help. McGuire and the money and the open safe were forgotten. It was now every man for himself. There ensued minutes of appalling confusion. A boat with men tumbling and leaping in as it swung reached the water; a second boat on the port side also got away.

Alverado roared for an axe to free the boat, but Sam had dexterously clinched a chain about the running gear, and nothing could be done. Blind terror seized Jacobo's men. The little group about the boat Sam had defended melted away and rushed to the port side, where the last lifeboat was being swung out.

On the deserted deck, with blood flowing from two wounds, Sam lay silently, with his eyes closed.

CHAPTER XXXVII

FIFTEEN minutes later Alverado stood in the stern-sheets of a boat with Jacobo beside him, and looked back at the doomed vessel. He, de Mattos, and Jacobo had made their escape in the last lifeboat, and with the last of the crew aboard. And as he stood looking back at the *April Day* he could see quickening flames run back and forward along the entire deck. A scarlet snake of flame seemed to close upon and coil about the masts for'ard. The night was dark, but the burning *April Day* provided a scarlet illumination, growing brighter and brighter at every minute. There was something of grandeur in the scene.

The burning vessel, the mirror-like empty sea, a star-spangled sky above, and no breath of air moving.

For some minutes, as the men pulled away, Alverado kept his position, standing in the stern-sheets of the boat. Then, as he took his seat, he glanced at the water, rippling beneath his men's oars. It had taken on a new character of surface, which reflected the ship's glow in colored and prismatic light—a strange and sublimely unpleasant effect.

"What's that on the water, Jacobo?"

Jacobo glanced at the water, then up at Alverado.

"Oil," he said, and cast a terrified glance over his shoulder at the burning vessel.

For the last hour oil had been pouring in hundreds of gallons from the *April Day's* side. The sea was covered with crude oil, and even if there had been a wind, there

would have been no ripple on the ocean's surface; it was as though they rowed upon a lake of petroleum.

Silence fell upon the boat's crew, and the men continued to row steadily and sturdily away. All eyes were fixed meanwhile on the burning vessel, and at last what Jacobo had long expected occurred. The *April Day* blew up amidships. A deep detonation shook the night. A tremendous, dramatic moment of dissolution followed. Then the forepart and the stern of the vessel seemed to run together. The stern, wrapped in flame, lifted for a moment, high above the water, dived and vanished. Simultaneously one of the rowers in Alverado's boat uttered a scream, leapt to his feet, and covered his face with his hands.

"What is it?" demanded Alverado savagely.

The man, with a violent Latin gesture, thrust out both arms.

"The sea, señor, the sea!"

Alverado turned.

The sea was on fire!

* * * * *

Then, upon the immense stage of night, in the dying redness of the burning ship, a new drama became enacted—a fiery manifestation, beyond anything Alverado or Jacobo had ever seen. The sea was on fire. And the sailor who had uttered the cry was rocking in his seat, with eyes covered, a pitiful and contemptible fragment of humanity, all gone, all surrendered—a thing that was no longer a man, but was a convulsive terror, awaiting death. Alverado stood up and looked about him. The stern of the *April Day* had totally disappeared, and an intense

black column of smoke arose. The for'ard part of the vessel still smoked, and threading the sea from the vessel's side were veins of living fire.

But from the *April Day* animation and vitality seemed to have passed away; she was a dead thing; the last tremor of life had occurred within her. The new manifestation on the waters riveted Alverado's attention. In the darkness he could see no other boats escaping from the ship save his own. But rising around the smoking vessel was a lurid blue light, volatile and singular and quivering. And presently out of this encircling light a long, thick trail of fire ran westward on the water, a flaming trail of light. Another trail ran like a vast spoke of a wheel at another angle, passing within a hundred yards of Alverado's boat. Then out of this wheel-spoke came little radiations of light, little dancing and fluttering spirals which rhythmically advanced and receded. Sometimes the flames seemed to leap from the sea, pass through the air, touch the water, and again leap up.

And now the flames had reached them. It was as though devils were at work. For the first time the men in the boat felt the heat, and, looking down, saw at a little distance away, creeping upon them, a low blue flame, a vivid intensity of color which threw a ghastly light on the faces of Alverado's companions. The big man's voice grew hoarse as he urged them to row madly, and they rowed madly. But the blue flame stealthily advanced, crept about the boat, and touched the oars. . . .

They were rowing madly in a sea of heaving fire. The fire was now lower than the gun-wale of the boat, but little spiked tongues of red-tipped flame reached up above the gunwale, feeling and groping into the boat, exactly like

the tentacles of an octopus. The man who had first seen the flaming oil lay in the bottom of the boat in a state of frenzy. Following him came the others; the oars sagged, crackling in the blazing sea. The heat mounted and became terrific. Alverado seized an oar, and forced another into Jacobo's hands. Together they rowed frantically and madly. They were in a sea of fire, but there was still hope that at any moment they might reach the edge of the spreading oil, the edge and safety. And so they rowed with hands blistered and burnt, and the exterior of the boat charred almost black, and with the dragging oars burning and crackling. Alverado, climbing over his prostrate men, sent these abandoned oars adrift, and saw them go blazing away, definite centers of solid fire.

After that he rowed, for how long he did not know, but for endless hours he and Jacobo seemed to pull through the mocking flames. And at length the flames seemed to lose interest in him. That diabolical dance of death seemed to cease, from sheer exhaustion. He was looking upward, weary and exhausted, and, to his surprise, he saw that the sky had paled and that dawn was at hand.

* * * * *

Two hours later Alverado, from his seat in the stern-sheets of the boat, with his crew singed and pale with terror, leaned back, drew in a deep breath of satisfaction, and turned to Jacobo.

"Captain," he said, "do you see that?" He beckoned towards a strip of amber sand, to dark, tree-clad slopes farther inland. The boat was pulling towards the shore, a very few miles from the place of appointed meeting with Escabodo.

"How long will it take us to reach the shore?"

"A long time," Jacobo answered, "with only one pair of oars. This is a big boat, señor."

Sebastian Alverado, a grim figure in his tattered coat and with smoke-streaked face, twisted in his seat, looking back over the waters. The morning sun was dancing on a multitude of little waves. Every trace of the *April Day* had vanished. But far westward the big man could see a long cloud of smoke, traveling low and slowly over the water, the last vestige, the ghost, of the events of those dark hours.

He drew in his breath sharply. Never in his life had he had so narrow a squeak as that. Ringed about, and in the very embrace of death, he had yet escaped. Through all that abyss of terror he had emerged to success, for as the men rowed he could already see moving figures ashore. Escabodo's men, the welders of the New Mexico, he told himself. He again looked about him, and something he had not noticed amid the rolling smoke to westward caught his eyes, another boat, a small boat, was being driven vigorously through the water.

"What boat is that?" he demanded sharply of Jacobo.

The captain shielded his eyes with a hand and peered at the distant speck for a full minute.

"It's the No. 1 starboard dinghy, señor."

"Who is the man rowing?" Alverado asked sharply.

"Captain Biddeford, señor."

CHAPTER XXXVIII

BIDDEFORD'S boat was scorched and black, Biddeford's face, too, was blackened, and even his short, dark hair had been singed in the inferno of the night. He was rowing strongly, however, making three times the pace of Alverado's heavier boat. He had seen the other boat long before he himself had been seen, and a grim smile flickered across his lips at the thought of the surprise they must have got in seeing him still afloat. He was tired, his face was drawn and fatigued, and he dreaded the rising of the sun. For the tropic heat that would beat down upon them would be bad for the man who, for the fourth time, had saved his life. It seemed always Sam Ducat's business to be saving him, and last night's adventure had been the greatest of all Sam's feats. At the very ultimate moment, when Biddeford had struggled on deck with Miss Everdale unconscious in his arms, he had found Sam bleeding and lifeless, as he thought, beside the boat.

He had found little difficulty in unhitching Sam's chain that had clutched the boat's running gear and had frustrated Alverado's crew. Of the events that followed, of the blazing sea, of himself rowing wildly to get out of the zone of fire, he could recall only moments. The moment of the *April Day's* explosion and disappearance; the moment when Miss Everdale, first opening her eyes, saw his figure in the red glow of the fire; the moment when the oil on the water caught. . . . There had been little ceremony between them. A return to the primitive relations

had stirred and revived the girl—had been, in fact, the best thing that could happen to her. Biddeford, stern and almost ferocious, had commanded her to dip piled sacks from the bottom of the boat into the sea and lay them over the gun-wale, and some on the bottom of the boat covering the prone figure of Sam. And Sam had been deadly still, with a great smear of blood on his shirt—so still, in fact, that Biddeford had paused once and asked :

“Is he breathing?”

“I think so,” she had answered.

Biddeford had shipped his oar and rolled wet sacking about it at that. But his face had lightened. She had seen it change in the red glow. And after that, a wetting, an incessant wetting of sacks, a wet sack about herself, her face shielded by a wet sack. . . . A flaming nightmare. A man rowing . . . darkness . . . stillness, and then dawn. It was dawn now; she was looking about her from the well of the boat. And the man, the hero to whom she owed her life, was looking at her. His sternness of last night had thrilled her, but the sternness was gone now; he smiled.

“Edna, how is he?” he asked.

She looked down at Sam; her handkerchief, a minute, absurd thing wrung in sea-water, was about his forehead. She smiled up at Biddeford.

“I think we shall save him.”

“If we can get ashore before the sun gets too strong, and there is a doctor,” said Biddeford, his eyes fixed upon the girl seated within arm’s reach of him.

A long silence followed. Golden shafts of light ascended into the eastern sky, and in the hush of daybreak she uttered his name.

"Martin!"

He laughed joyously, showing his white teeth.

"Edna, your father put you in my charge," he said; "he didn't tell me to make love to you."

"You have not made love to me," she answered audaciously.

"No, but I intend to."

"When did you first find out you loved me?"

"In the National Theatre in Mexico City," Biddeford answered.

"Oh, I loved you from the very first moment I saw you."

Then, having uttered this abandoned statement, she blushed exquisitely.

But Biddeford liked her abandon, just as he liked her dark eyes, her courage, her torn and blackened blouse that revealed an arm slender and strong. She had escaped almost scot-free in the fire—a scorched hand, a wisp of hair singed. . . .

But she had lost her heart irretrievably. She liked a man who could be ruthless in danger as Biddeford was ruthless; she adored his lack of ceremony, his comforting roughness, his roaring commands. Glorious! He and she had faced death together, and he loved her. Ferociously out of the burning ship he had carried her in his arms.

* * * * *

"I don't know who these people ashore are," said Biddeford, as figures of armed men articulated themselves on the beach an hour later; "they may be Alverado's confederates. But if my wireless has had the proper effect they ought to be Mexican Government troops."

He continued to row until half a dozen men in shirts and trousers rushed into the water and ran the little boat on the beach. He sprang out instantly, and found himself confronting a slender young man in a Mexican Government uniform.

"You are Captain Biddeford, are you not?" said the young man, with polite gravity.

Biddeford, without a hat, his trousers belted about his waist, and in a vest that had finished its serviceable career, admitted his identity.

But he had already recognized the Mexican Government uniform.

"I was rather afraid we might have run into some of Escabodo's men. I have a friend aboard in the dinghy who is in a bad way, wounded badly."

"We have doctors and a field hospital here," said the polite young man; "we shall do everything for him. The Government is grateful to you, Captain Biddeford. His Excellency General Mudura desires to see you at your earliest convenience."

"As to Escabodo and his insurgent followers, we came on them by surprise; some were seized and shot as insurgents, some escaped to the hills."

The young officer hurried to the boat with Biddeford, looked a moment at the prone figure of Sam, and gave a rapid order.

"Your friend, Captain, shall have every attention. He shall be taken to the hospital immediately. You will then, Captain, no doubt be good enough to accompany me to His Excellency the General."

During this conversation the big boat containing Alvarado, which Biddeford had outdistanced, had been draw-

ing nearer the shore. The young officer enquired who was in the boat, and said nothing when Biddeford told him. His lips tightened, however, and he took a second keen look at the crowded craft; then instantly turned his attention to a party of men who hurried forward carrying a stretcher for Sam.

Six hours later Sam regained consciousness in a cool field hospital. A doctor in a long white overall stood looking down at him, and on a chair at his cot-side was Biddeford. Sam wearily opened his eyes, and Biddeford immediately gripped his hand.

"Well, Sam," he said, smiling, and looking with infinite relief into his friend's face, "you'll get better after all."

Sam, unable to do more, flickered his eyelids and very faintly returned Martin's pressure of his fingers. Alverado's bullet, the doctor had informed Biddeford, had passed clean through the upper lobe of Sam's left lung. The second bullet had cut a channel at the base of the neck which had bled copiously. But neither that nor the lung wound, which had probably cauterized itself, was, in the light of war experience, fatal.

For some minutes Biddeford sat at the cot-side and gave Sam the later events of the night, conveying the news also that Alverado had been captured as he stepped ashore and was to be tried by military court for sedition. Then, promising to come back later in the evening, Biddeford went back to the long bamboo-built house which His Excellency General Mudura had made his headquarters.

Here he spent some time with General Mudura, a rather old-fashioned-looking soldier with long moustaches and an imperial, who had received him in the morning with almost exaggerated cordiality. He had also, with Spanish

courtesy, set apart a little room in the house where Edna could rest.

When Biddeford reached the General's quarters, after visiting Sam, the officer was alone with his orderly, who had entered the room a moment or two before.

A long envelope, the red seals of which were still intact, lay on the table at the General's hand. With it was a smaller envelope which General Mudura handed to Biddeford.

"Captain, both these letters are for you; they were sent," said the General formally, "by Don Sebastian Alverado. My court pronounced sentence on Señor Alverado this afternoon, and his last request is that these letters shall be delivered to you unopened."

He gravely placed the second envelope in the young man's hand. With drumming pulse, Martin opened the smaller envelope. Then, in Alverado's bold, clear handwriting he read:

"DEAR CAPTAIN,

"The document I send with this you would get in any case, but I prefer to send it myself. Where I am going I shall not need it!

"SEBASTIAN ALVERADO."

Biddeford was silent for a full minute, the curt, mocking lines repeating themselves in his thoughts as though strangely and fantastically tolled by a passing bell. Then he opened the second envelope and drew forth the concession.

That evening, at sunset, he and Edna were wandering on the beach together, when suddenly, from the direction

of the camp, a rifle-volley rang out upon the evening air.

Edna's face blanched, her fingers clutched his arm.

"Martin, did you hear?"

"Yes," said Martin, coming to a halt and lifting his head. He, too, felt the color leaving his cheeks.

* * * * *

Five weeks later Biddeford was back in London again, staying at the hotel in Craven Street where Detective Park had shown so keen an interest in his doings. He had spent five paradisaical weeks in the homeward company of Edna and her father and mother, and now was wearing a suit, not made for him, but "built" by Sedgely Gornal's Conduit Street tailor. He was setting out to attend a formal meeting at Lord Hyde's house. A taxi awaited him at the hotel door.

As he gave Lord Hyde's address and stepped into the vehicle, a trim gloved hand glided into his.

"How long shall you be with Lord Hyde?" Edna asked.

"Ten minutes, perhaps, not more." He turned and looked at her, and was a little intimidated at finding her so fashionable. And she was lovelier than ever.

"I've never lived till now," he said, suddenly lifting her hand to his lips, "but henceforth I am going to live a hundred seconds to the minute."

At the door of Lord Hyde's residence he performed the feat of kissing her without the chauffeur seeing. But the chauffeur, an experienced man, connived with him by turning his back and exhibiting an exaggerated interest in distant weather conditions.

In Lord Hyde's room overlooking Green Park, Biddeford, a few minutes later, found himself in impressive

company. He had expected to see only Lord Hyde and Sedgely Gornal, but when he entered four men were already seated at the peer's table—Lord Hyde himself, an official from the Foreign Office, and facing these two a third man, whom he instantly recognized as Abel Johnson of New York, who months ago had taken passage with him aboard the *Lachine*.

When Lord Hyde had greeted him, he introduced Martin to the handsome grey-moustached man who sat opposite him.

"Major," he said, "this is Captain Biddeford—Major Allen Brampton, of the United States Embassy."

The Major reached over the table and gripped Martin cordially by the hand.

Lord Hyde then took a portfolio from Gornal and laid it before him on the table.

"Captain Biddeford," he said, "I have sent for you so that you may witness a little formal ceremony." A smile crept into his eyes. "I shall not keep you long, as I expect you have other interests in London at the present moment."

Biddeford smiled frankly. He did not care if they knew he was in love. Let them know! Was there a man there who had ever won a girl who could hold a candle to Edna?

Lord Hyde continued: "Captain, you will be a little surprised to hear that His Majesty's Government does not intend to regain possession of the concession you took so much trouble to secure. As a matter of fact, an agreement has been concluded between ourselves and the United States Government, and an equitable arrangement has been made whereby the concession becomes the joint

property of the two countries. All along the ownership of this concession has been a moot point. The Norman Grant Company purchased it in the first instance, and on the day of Norman Grant's death——"

"His murder, as we now know, by Sebastian Alverado," put in the American diplomat.

Lord Hyde bowed.

"On that day," he went on, "I received a wire from Grant accepting my offer of purchase. This wire he sent himself privately, and it was never authenticated. I was right, however, in considering the concession ours. On the other hand, Major Allen Brampton was right in his contention that the concession belonged to the United States, and that the sale to us had never been consummated. In the meantime, it looked as if both of us would lose it; for if Alverado had established his new Government in Mexico there is no doubt that it would have been lost to both of us."

He took up the portfolio Gornal had placed before him, and opened it and took out the concession itself. Then, with a grave bow, he handed it to the American diplomat.

"Major," he said, "I have pleasure in returning to you a document which was the property of a citizen of the United States, the late Norman Grant."

With a dignity equal to Lord Hyde's own, Major Allen Brampton rose and glanced at the company.

"Gentlemen," he announced, "on behalf of my Government, I have pleasure in thanking Lord Hyde for his perfectly correct attitude in this matter. I have further to say that, my Government appreciating that attitude, I now return the document to him." He leaned forward and pushed the document across the table.

Lord Hyde again put out a hand, and pushed it into the middle of the table between the two parties, where it remained. This crystallization of the case pleased both sides, and Lord Hyde beckoned to Biddeford.

When Martin rose and stood at the back of his chair, he said over his shoulder:

"Biddeford, I felt it was due to you to know the outcome of your efforts, and to-morrow at eleven I want to have a further talk with you. The Transport Department intends to build a large fleet of tankers for service in the Mexican oil trade. . . . I think there will be something for you there; come to-morrow and we will talk it over." He gripped Martin's hand.

Three minutes later Martin went out of the room, leaving the great men, these wielders of destiny, seated about the table. But he in no way felt his exclusion. Edna was outside waiting for him in the taxi!





